

The Role of Women in Victorian-era Spirit Photography: A New Narrative

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts (Art History) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 2015

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## **Abstract**

### **The Role of Women in Victorian-era Spirit Photography: A New Narrative**

Felicity Tsering Chödrön Hamer

Borne by the same ideas that founded Spiritualism in the nineteenth century, spirit photographs are joint-portraits achieved posthumously, without use of a corpse, wherein the bereaved are visually united with the deceased. These enchanted mementos are said to have been ‘invented’ in 1861, in Boston, Massachusetts, by William H. Mumler. Spirit photographers typically worked with individuals who claimed mediumistic qualities in order to enable the appearance of the magical ‘extras’ of the deceased. The majority of mediums were women and it is not surprising that the contributions of women to the production of spirit photography have been limited almost exclusively to such enabling activities. I will argue for a more foundational placement of women within the narrative of this innovative development within personal mourning rituals, shaped largely by women’s expertise and practice. Not only is the readiness to dismiss women as active participants in the invention illogical, but Mumler’s position as sole inventor has been maintained notwithstanding inconsistencies, and outright contradictions. My investigation of his involvement with this genre of photography is fueled by the acknowledged proximity of two women – Helen F. Stuart and Hannah Frances Green (later Mumler) – to the invention. With Stuart generally presented as owner of the studio in which Mumler stumbled upon his invention and Green as a secretary and medium in the same studio, scholars tend to refuse these women any larger roles, pushing them rather quickly to the periphery. This text establishes the viability of a new narrative that addresses these concerns, making the heretical suggestion that these women were in fact one in the same, and proposing that this woman was in fact the ‘author’ if not ‘co-author’ of spirit photography.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many people contributed to the successful completion of this thesis but I would like to begin first and foremost by thanking my advisor, Dr. Catherine MacKenzie for her unending support and enthusiasm for my topic. She has given me the courage to tackle this project and the tools to complete it. I am eternally grateful to her for her time, her patience and her incredibly large brain.

Next I would like to thank the entire Department of Art History at Concordia University for their encouragement and feedback. In particular, my reader Dr. Steven Stowell, who inspired me early in my graduate studies to continue my investigation of spirit photographs, offering me a new lens with which to consider them.

From my new department at Concordia University, Communications, I would like to thank Dr. Jeremy Stolow for opening me up to a community of like-minded scholars. I am fortunate and eager to begin this new chapter of my research with him.

I wish to express my gratitude for the funding I have received; two Faculty of Fine Arts Fellowships as well as a Student Mobility Award which facilitated a research trip to Boston in the summer of 2014. Many individuals in the Boston area have offered their time to my project. Thank you to Catharina Slaughterback and Patricia Boulos of the Boston Athenæum; Aaron Schmidt from the Special Collections of the Boston Public Library; Anna J. Clutterbuck-Cook and Anne E. Bentley of the Massachusetts Historical Society and their affiliate, specialist in hair jewellery, Sarah Nehama; Rhonda R. McClure of The New England Historic Genealogical Society and Elizabeth Bouvier, Head of Archives at The MA Supreme Judicial Court. Also in the

US, I thank Clayton Lewis and Diana Sykes of The Clements library as well as the researcher Diana Mankowski; Joe R. Struble, Ross Knapper and Barbara Galasso of the George Eastman House. Thank you to Jacklyn Burns of The J. Paul Getty Museum for answering my unending queries and also to this institution for making so many of Mumler's images available free of charge through their open content program. Thanks also to The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals for archiving and sharing material so crucial to my research. Finally, thank you to Jack and Beverly Wilgus of Bright Bytes and Deborah Dibble of Jewels Collecting Dust for generously sharing their images with me.

Many thanks to Dr. Louis Kaplan and Dr. Robert S. Cox, both for their invaluable research of this topic and for taking the time to write me.

I would like to thank my friends and family for their support and my mother, Penny, in particular, for her services as editor and therapist during these challenging first years of motherhood and graduate studies.

Thank you to my partner Chris and our beautiful son Clarence for my wonderful life. I am the luckiest and you are my favourites. I love you so much and look forward to meeting our newest addition in March of 2016!

“Mrs. Stuart—This is to certify that I, Mrs. Isaac Babbitt, have a Spirit Photograph of my husband, taken at your rooms, by Mr. Mumler. It is recognized by all that have seen it, who knew him when upon earth, as a perfect likeness, and I am myself satisfied, that his spirit was present, although invisible to mortals.

Yours, with respect,  
Mrs. Isaac Babbitt

Forest Avenue,  
Roxbury Mass., Nov. 19<sup>th</sup>, 1862.”

—“The Spirit Photographs,”  
*The Banner of Light* (December 13, 1862): 4.

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## Introduction

Borne by the same ideas that founded Spiritualism in the nineteenth century, spirit photographs are joint-portraits achieved posthumously, without use of a corpse, wherein the bereaved are visually united with the deceased. According to accounts of the time and repeated by the substantial literature which has grown up around the subject of spirit photography, these enchanted mementos are said to have been ‘invented’ in 1861, in Boston, Massachusetts, by William H. Mumler. They became a formidable presence in the personal and political mourning cultures of the United States and other nations, even as critics, including Spiritualists, continued to raise questions about the practice that was quickly picked up by numerous photographers. Indeed the purported inventor was himself accused of deception as early as 1863, and forced into a court room in 1869.

As their practices developed, spirit photographers typically worked with individuals who claimed mediumistic abilities that enabled the appearance of the magical ‘extras’ of the deceased, more often than not very faint likenesses. Since the majority of mediums were women, it is not surprising that the contributions of women to the production of spirit photography have been limited almost exclusively in relation to such enabling activities. Here I will argue for a more foundational placement of women within the narrative of spirit photography. Viewing the phenomenon as an innovative development within mourning rituals, I have long thought that spirit photography was likely to have been very closely affiliated with the therapeutic structures of mourning devised and coordinated for nineteenth-century society largely by women’s expertise and practice. This conviction led me to investigate the circumstances surrounding Mumler’s involvement with this genre of photography, my efforts fueled by the acknowledged proximity of two women to the invention: Helen F. Stuart and Hannah Frances Green (later

Mumler).<sup>1</sup> With Stuart generally presented as owner of the photography studio in which Mumler ‘accidentally’ stumbled upon his invention and Green as a secretary – and later a medium – in the same studio who encouraged the spirits to communicate and appear, the writing of the past and present tends to refuse these women any larger roles, pushing them rather quickly to the periphery.

“I’m tired of William Mumler being the inventor of spirit photography.” This reaction, from the art historian, Lucy Traverse, upon learning of my research, demonstrates that I am not alone in wanting to question the absolute primacy of Mumler in accounts of the development of spirit photography.<sup>2</sup> Given their critical involvement in mourning practices, the readiness to dismiss women as active participants in the invention defies a certain conceptual logic. Furthermore, Mumler’s position as sole inventor has been maintained notwithstanding inconsistencies, incomplete information and what appear to be outright contradictions. This thesis, employing careful visual analysis and extensive archival research, establishes the viability of a new narrative that addresses these concerns: positioning Helen F. Stuart as creator or co-creator of this new genre of photography, as well as presenting the very strong likelihood that she was using this name in order to cloak her real identity as Hannah Green.

While certainly foregrounding the role of women in the invention of a controversial genre of photography, this new narrative is not without its problems. For example, a strong part of the

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<sup>1</sup> More often than not, public records give Hannah’s maiden name as Green, though a few sources employ an alternate spelling, ‘Greene’.

<sup>2</sup> Traverse is a PhD candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. We spoke in Montreal on March 29, 2015 following her presentation of “The Soul Shine Glowingly through the Same”: The Soul-Irradiation of Nineteenth-Century Photographic Portraiture and Projection,” her contribution to a fascinating panel on Photography and the Occult hosted by the Society for Science and Media Conference. When contacted, Robert S. Cox, author of *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*, showed enthusiasm for my topic and regret that the treatment – “by me and others” – of Mumler had been so cursory. “The main thing is that since Stuart was somewhat ancillary to my focus, I didn’t pursue her as much as I should have (or would today), but I am thrilled that you’re doing so.” Robert S. Cox, e-mail message to author, March 30, 2015.

argument – that the figure known in scholarship as Stuart must be acknowledged as a central figure – is based on a very close analysis of photographs, almost none of which were dated and some with unidentified photographers. Thus the “Bodies of Work” section in which I assert that Mumler learned his photographic skills and the structure of his initial spirit photographs from this woman, is lengthy and at times focuses on the smallest of details. It is hoped that my observations will, outside of the main concerns of this thesis, serve photographic historians as spirit photography in the United States during the crucial early years of its existence has not been subject to much stylistic analysis, with even Mumler’s oeuvre not yet having been seriously addressed.

An unanticipated direction when first I began my research for this thesis – the recognition that the name ‘Helen F. Stuart’ is likely to have been an identity created temporarily for Hannah Frances Green – has also posed additional hurdles in my challenge of the standard account of the invention of spirit photography. Archival documents, indeed the absence of documentation, can answer many questions, but not all. Among the many potential explanations is the possibility that this genre, now considered fraudulent by most, lent itself to ‘shady’ forms of behaviour by its practitioners.<sup>3</sup> However, my thesis leaves open the question of why these ‘two women’, at the heart of what is generally considered to have been Mumler’s enterprise, may have actually been one. The explanation lies, I suspect, at the intersection of personal relationships (some of which will probably always be ‘unknowable’) and gendered expectations of Victorian-era America rather than being specifically tied to the ‘spirit’ of spirit photography, but I cannot be certain.

What can be said with a high degree of confidence through this thesis is that the marginalization

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<sup>3</sup> I am interested in spirit photography as an historical phenomenon, one which was challenged from its inception and yet, for example, still advocated by established members of society well into the 1890s: see Dr. Dean Clarke, “Spirit Photography,” *California Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. IV, pp. 851- 859. Thus I have not here attempted to deal with the “true” nature of the genre, other than to record the challenges raised against and the support given it at the time.

of women in a phenomenon so closely linked to zones of female authority – mourning practices and key aspects of Spiritualism – has proven impossible to maintain at the moment of its emergence. Her role in this phenomena and true identity aside, the woman who existed as Mrs. Helen F. Stuart in mid-nineteenth century Boston, was a talented and pioneering photographer. Greater attention to her activities is long overdue and it brings me great pleasure to bring so much of her material together in these pages, perhaps even to incite a retrospective of her work.

### **Fixing ‘Death’: Spiritual Photography as Part of the Therapeutic Realm**

As a photolab technician in the 1990s, I had the opportunity to examine many private photographs. Photography allows us to collect things and to collect people, and to see what people choose to ‘keep’ is interesting and revealing. Exceptional mementos that they are, photographs exceed mere iconic, physical representation as there is an implied indexical relationship to the subject as well.<sup>4</sup> Clearly iconic in their mimicry of the sitter, photographs seem to possess some trace of the referent as well. Photographic emulsion has the ability to capture the shadow of its subject, and the process by which this shadow is produced – light literally bouncing off the prototype – creates this sense of indexicality. The dual referencing of the subject, both iconic and indexical, appeals to viewers on an intuitive level that can take precedence over their own, less tangible recollections. Although often criticized for the obscured, ambiguous ‘extra’ produced, spirit photography, unlike straight photography, does not threaten to influence the fading memory. Spirit photographs are shaped by the desires of the intended viewer thus making them highly evocative and intensely personal objects. Like other relics, such as the

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<sup>4</sup> In Semiotics, as it was defined by Charles Sanders Peirce in 1867, there are three main types of signs. Each sign differs in their relationship to the signified; an icon *resembles* the object, indexes have a *physical connection* to the prototype and a symbol’s efficacy is reliant on established, *conventional interpretation*. Anne D’Alleva. *Methods & Theories of Art History*. (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2005), 29-31.

Shroud of Turin or Veronica's Veil, the perceived indexical nature of spirit photographs becomes more important than the iconic relationship the images have to the prototype.

While the context of images is crucial to any consideration of their meaning, a pre-emptory exploration of spirit photographs through the lens of semiotics is productive in unpacking their theoretical potential. As all photographs possess the addition of an indexical relationship to the subject, akin to a lock of hair, they have obvious applications within the bereavement industry. Photographic portraits however, although so effective in their roles as place markers for the absent, unnaturally *extend* our relationships and potentially, the grieving process. In my future research, I will endeavor to demonstrate how late nineteenth-century spirit photography had the ability to effectively *solve* this problem of representation by reanimating the image of the departed in an evocative and undirected manner. Spirit photography went beyond collecting what was, or might be, lost. By retrieving the image of the deceased from the unknown, these images – imbued with the desire of the client – demonstrated the lingering presence of those who had passed, just as it was *felt* by the bereaved.

As with other imaginative applications of the medium, spirit photography challenges the truthful, unmediated representation of the prototype that 'indexicality' implies.<sup>5</sup> However, as so much of the spirit photograph's therapeutic potential hinges on this 'evidentiary status', a curious reversal is at play. Though at odds with the imagination, the same indexicality that bestows scientificity to the medium, in this case, gives the griever *opportunity* for the creative input that revived those they wished to appear. Indeed, there were many incidences, such as the June 1875 trial of

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<sup>5</sup> "Imagination will not flourish in the shadow of the real. Too bad, because most of Western studies of the nature of photography accept its indexicality" There is an assumed indexical relationship between the photograph and memory which, however, fails to account for the imagination—a perceived flaw or hindrance to this indexicality which implies a truthful, unmediated representation of the prototype. Martha Langford, *Image and Imagination*, ed. Martha Langford (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), page 5.



European spirit photographer Edouard Isidore Buguet, wherein even after the spirit photographer revealed his deception; customers insisted that theirs were real.<sup>6</sup>

The German language has two separate words for memory; *Gedächtnis* refers to an archive of images whereas *Erinnerung* refers to our recollection of images.<sup>7</sup> We employ our internal images in order to animate or process what we perceive externally. Using the language of art historian and theorist Hans Belting, the living medium of the brain draws upon the image stores – *Gedächtnis* – through the act of remembering – *Erinnerung* – and projects the resulting association back to the imagination that in turn censors or alters the image.<sup>8</sup> Using this logic, the enchantment of *spirit* photographs can be interpreted as the result of an imagination that has effectively retrieved and projected stored images onto the vague, semi-translucent ‘extras’, with the aim of rendering the brain unable to distinguish between what is received from what is produced.

Understanding ourselves as inhabitants of a body, there is a sense that similarly, external images must also reside within the media onto or from which they are projected. Humans have long wished to communicate with images as though living, using their imagination to animate them.<sup>9</sup> So, despite and perhaps *because* photography provides an ever increasing abundance of faithful depictions of the deceased, more than ever there is a need for a type of magic to allow their animation through our memories. Our memories are manipulated – and sometimes fabricated –

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<sup>6</sup> Clément Chéroux, “Ghost Dialectics,” in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and The Occult*, ed. Clément Chéroux, et al. (London: Yale University Press, 2004), 50-51. There were also incidences wherein the imagination was used in order to counter the protests of clients who were dissatisfied with the appearance of the resulting spirit. In speaking of the work of Frederik Hudson, his cohort, the medium Georgiana Houghton admitted: “Some persons may be disappointed in the photographs themselves, because they do not come up to their *imagination* of spirits.” However, she also claimed that spirit photographs could produce a greater likeness to the subject than straight portraiture. Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 2005), 98.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Belting, “Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology,” *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2005): 306.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Belting, “Image, Medium, Body,” 306.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Belting, “Image, Medium, Body,” 306.

through those images we perceive externally, whereas our own 'Gedächtnis' is a far better source for recollecting a person as we perceived them. In this sense, in place of a photograph, the client of a spirit photographer was better served by these visually ambiguous referents to the deceased as this media necessitated and therefore *allowed* room for imagination.

Robert S. Cox offers this compelling analysis of the imaginative process that occurred as grievers studied their spirit photograph:

In interpreting their own portraits along with the spirits beside them, the living engaged in a self-creative process, asserting their authority to define themselves in relation to categories of social reality. Spirit photographs became sites for an insistent desire to reconstruct memory of the dead on the sometimes fuzzy and obscure images identified as spirits and the memory of the living on the equally fuzzy views of cultural institutions and practices, with sympathy and family forging links.<sup>10</sup>

Where there is intense longing, only a hint of the desired presence is required and evocative photographs deliver ample fodder for this nostalgia. Familiar with the Spiritualist world view, in his 2003 publication, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*, Cox provides insight into the psychological reception of spirit photographs. As Cox asserts, while non-spiritualists were caught up in arguments of veracity based on the indexical nature of the images, Spiritualist faith in these images was dependent on the “emotional connection between the living and the dead”. Thus, in this nineteenth century example, photography’s inherent indexicality served as a mere platform through which to inspire joyous thoughts of reunion. Once ignited, resemblance to the prototype was eclipsed by the miraculous reappearance of the deceased that evidenced the unwavering bond between the deceased and the living. Indeed, in the strength of the client’s convictions – their willingness to suspend disbelief – they demonstrate just that.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 123.

In *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium and Body*, Hans Belting suggests that photography is an ideal means through which to procure placemarkers for the absent as it has the capacity to create “artificial bodies that cannot die”.<sup>11</sup> Photographs show us the shadow of what *has* been and therefore *cannot* be present. Re-animated as it were, and as they contain the imprint of that which is not in fact visible in the room at the time of exposure, I propose that spirit photographs defy popular criticism of photography as inherent indicator of absence. Practices such as postmortem photography lock the deceased in the past by commemorating death. Conversely, spirit photography suggests a moment in time beyond death and therefore the possibility of future moments shared. Furthermore, as Judith Pike notes in *Poe and the Revenge of the Exquisite Corpse*, most efforts to ‘tame the corpse’ ventured to keep it at bay, but spirit photography encouraged and then mediated its resurgence. Rituals such as the placement of the tombstone symbolically weighed down and prevented the body from rising, and practitioners of postmortem photography quelled the dread of decay by displaying the body as though sleeping or engaged in some activity. However, spirit photographs, “became the nineteenth century’s best vehicle for enacting the proper mourning of the revenant. While séances might provoke the dread of the fully animated undead, the spirit photograph allows for one’s dearly departed to maintain an afterlife without fear of animation, for these dead never reappeared in the flesh.”<sup>12</sup>

Openly practiced in the nineteenth century, post-mortem photography has rarely been studied in terms of its impact on individuals. Considered macabre by today’s standards, the practice has diminished and moved underground as changing attitudes towards death rendered the practice taboo. While attitudes towards the images changed, many still circulate in family albums because

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<sup>11</sup> Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images, Picture, Medium and Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Judith E. Pike. “Poe and the Revenge of the Exquisite Corpse”, *Studies in American Fiction* (Autumn 1998 v26 i2): 171.

descendants, for superstitious or respectful reasons, are unwilling to dispose of them. As a commercial printer in the late nineties, I can attest to having encountered snapshots of the deceased in their coffin. Despite changing tastes, obtaining one last photograph of a loved one at rest can bring a great deal of comfort or closure to some griever, particularly when grappling with the loss of a young child.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the clear value of these images, I have encountered only one study that rises above mere postulation, analyzing the *actual* impact of postmortem photography on individuals in order to gauge its true worth as a therapeutic device. A study by Blood and Cacciatore followed the experiences of one hundred and four grieving parents, demonstrates a nearly unanimous positive reaction to the procuring of post-mortem photographs. Of ninety-three parents who obtained images, ninety two were later grateful to have them despite their initial reluctance. Of the eleven who declined, nine later wished they had agreed to the session.<sup>14</sup> Advancements in the understanding of the impact of grief on parents demonstrate the need for a compassionate approach to the loss of a child, and the Blood and Cacciatore study provides a wealth of information – via testimonial – on how to best provide sensitive photographic services or educate parents who wish to procure their own images.<sup>15</sup> Overwhelmingly, participants felt that medical practitioners ought to urge parents to engage in this activity and that “hospitals should provide

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<sup>13</sup> Audrey Linkman. *Photography and Death*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 57. Although these last photographs are usually taken by a grieving amateur, one organization is devoted to the production of this type of memento. *Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep* pairs grieving parents with volunteer photographers willing to travel to their hospital to capture what are likely the only existent images of their stillborn or terminally ill infants. NILMDTS provides free of charge professional quality, retouched image files to families who can subsequently print at the lab of their choosing. Testimonials on the website attest to the positive impact this ‘remembrance photography’ provides. “Home Page,” *Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep*, accessed June 3, 2014, <https://www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org>.

<sup>14</sup> Cybele Blood and Joanne Cacciatore, “Parental Grief and Memento Mori Photography: Narrative, Meaning, Culture, and Context,” *Death Studies* 38, 1-5 (Jan-Jun 2014): 224-33.

<sup>15</sup> Until the 1970’s health care practitioners aimed to help parents forget their loss by preventing them from having contact with their stillborn children. Blood and Cacciatore, “Parental Grief and Memento Mori Photography,” 225.

education and support for this important psychosocial intervention.”<sup>16</sup> While the process and meaning of mourning was different in the nineteenth century, modern studies such as this do provide useful evidence and direction. In my opinion, spirit photography had a similarly therapeutic function and – in future research – I hope to uncover similarly valuable insight into the emotional engagement that occurred with these images.

The therapeutic potential of spirit photography is alleged to have been enjoyed by more than just the bereaved. My research will also acknowledge the nineteenth-century notion that these images helped the spirits themselves, providing them, in manner of speaking, with therapeutic assistance in their efforts to communicate from beyond. After Mumler’s announcement of his discovery, many Spiritualists professed to having been visited for some time by spirits who longed for just such a platform:

Dr. Gardner had said to me that the spirits had been asking for years for a method by which they could, in their communications with persons still in the flesh, establish their identity, and that that have been seeking in this precise direction. As many as six years ago, he says that they have prophesied exactly the thing, and looked forward to it as the test by which, beyond all dispute they could establish their identity with the persons they represented themselves to be.<sup>17</sup>

Women of the Victorian-era readily embraced this development which permitted an extension to the nurturing they had been encouraged to lavish upon their families in life, the same emotional investment they had previously been expected to silently retract after death.

## **Women and the ‘Dead’**

In nineteenth century Western culture, many have established mourning to be – at least

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<sup>16</sup> Blood and Cacciatore, “Parental Grief and Memento Mori Photography,” 225.

<sup>17</sup> J.G.H., “Spiritualism: Its Latest Phases and Personal Experience With It,” *Herald of Progress* (Dec 20, 1862): 6.

historically – a woman's area of expertise.<sup>18</sup> Primary caregivers in the home, women cared for family members after their death as well, washing and preparing their corpses for viewing. Bearing intimate witness to loss, women wrote death bed accounts and dominated in commemorative practices such as the production of hair jewellery. (Figs.1 and 2).<sup>19</sup> Though hair had been incorporated into the mourning jewellery of Western Europe and North America for centuries, it was taken up with renewed interest in the nineteenth century. Hair was worked into elaborate braids, weaves and patterns to be set under glass, or woven into chains for bracelets, necklaces or for men's pocket watches.<sup>20</sup> In "Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair", Christian Holm describes mourning jewels as "exhibited secrets," the wearer presenting themselves "as a participant in a hidden intimate network, from which other viewers are excluded."<sup>21</sup> Though produced in previous centuries, the popularity of hair jewellery peaked in mid-century America. The fabrication of these mementoes became a popular domestic activity for women, an expression of grief that memorialized – and contained a portion of – the departed.<sup>22</sup> During the Civil War, when soldiers left home to join the fight, it was customary to leave a portrait and lock of hair with their families or sweethearts. Advancements in

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<sup>18</sup> Linkman, *Photography and Death*, 2011; Gisela Ecker, "Gender in the Work of Grief and Mourning: Contemporary Requiems in German Literature." in *Women and Death: Representations of Female Victims and Perpetrators in German Culture 1500-2000*, eds. Helen Fronius and Anna Linto (Rochester: Camden House, 2008); Susan Starr Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Tucker, *Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 2005), to name a few.

<sup>19</sup> Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12, 98-99. Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 68.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Nehama, *In Death Lamented: The Tradition of Anglo-American Mourning Jewelry* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2012), 73.

<sup>21</sup> Christian Holm, "Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 38, No. 1, Hair (Fall, 2004): 140.

<sup>22</sup> Soon after losing a third child to scarlet fever, John Horsley wrote a note of consolation to his wife Rose on the event of her birthday, November 15, 1866. "We may be infinitely happy in the thought that our great affliction has brought us nearer each other than before–still *more* happy in the hope that the memory of our dear child will *ever* be an incentive to us to live our lives here, that when our hour comes we may look forward to earnest faithful trust to re-joining him and other most dear ones gone before. I have a little memorial of the day for you, a locket in which you can place our dearest Hugh's hair." Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 127.

photographic technology, namely the carte-de-visite, made portraiture affordable and increasingly widespread. Soldiers did not take the occasion of portrait taking lightly, knowing full well it might be the only portrait they ever sat for. Upon the soldier's death, this portrait and the lock of hair they had left behind, were frequently incorporated into mourning jewellery or placed in a locket. (Figs.3 and 4).<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 1** Unknown,  
*Georgian Victorian Hair Mourning Brooch, c. 1850*  
jewelscollectingdust.com



**Figure 2** Unknown  
*Victorian 15ct Gold Seed Pearl Heart Shape Plaited Hair Ring Mourning Brooch, c. 1850*  
jewelscollectingdust.com



**Figure 3** Fuller, Gilman's Block, Madison, WI  
*Julian Lewis Cdv by John S. Fuller, 1860*  
Wikimedia Commons

**Figure 4** Unknown  
*Victorian 15ct Gold Seed Pearl Heart Shape Plaited Hair Pin*  
jewelscollectingdust.com

<sup>23</sup> Nehama, *In Death Lamented*, 105.

In mid-nineteenth century North America and Western Europe, the growing obsession with death spawned a whole industry devoted to the production of accoutrements that enabled the display of appropriate grief.<sup>24</sup> This commodification of mourning rituals gave way for opportunity for various sentimental accoutrement and stores – maisons de deuil – were opened with the sole purpose of meeting these needs.<sup>25</sup> Everyday items were removed from habitual use and transformed into symbols of loss which sent and received social messages.<sup>26</sup> Though necessarily visible at all times, grief had to be demonstrated appropriately as excessive expression of sorrow was interpreted as suggesting that the bereaved did not trust that the spirit was eternal and that they would be reunited in death.<sup>27</sup> Expectations required that you not speak but instead wear your loss in a legible manner, thus the bereaved, women in particular, were essentially required to mourn publicly and yet silently. Often discouraged from attending middle and upper class funerals on account of a perceived inability to control their feelings, women were instead encouraged to communicate their loss through a vast array of objects and rituals.<sup>28</sup>

There were few exceptional circumstances under which it was considered appropriate for a woman to earn her own wage. Therefore, with the exclusion of heiresses, women of the Victorian-era's social and financial status – or lack thereof – was precarious and almost always

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<sup>24</sup> This commodification of grieving practices attracted criticism in England from the likes of Charles Dickens who in 1852 wrote the article "Trading Death" in which he expresses his disgust at the lavish funeral of The Duke of Wellington. He describes Victorian funerary practices as a "system of barbarous show and expense," including that they "could possibly do no honor to the memory of the dead, did great dishonour to the living, as inducing them to associate the most solemn of human occasions with unmeaning mum-meries, dishonest debt, profuse waste, and bad example in an utter oblivion of responsibility." Charles Dickens, "Trading Death," *Household Words* (November 27, 1852): 96.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 95. Such as Boston's own Crocker Mourning Shop, on Boylston Street c.1910.

<sup>26</sup> "...the consumption of commodities functions as a mechanism for sending but also receiving social messages, messages that do not simply 'express' one's place in society, but actively insert us into that place, determining our behavior and responses through their sheer irreducible physicality." Downey, *American Women's Ghost Stories*, 7, 98.

<sup>27</sup> Downey, *American Women's Ghost Stories*, 94. Moly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 26.

<sup>28</sup> Linkman, *Photography and Death*, 58. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 221.



defined by the presence of men in her life; first her father, then her husband and finally her adult sons or other male relatives. Spending most of their time in the home, women were encouraged and expected to spend their husband's money in order to amass the items that transformed the house into a safe haven for their spouse and children. These very items they were compelled to accumulate and develop emotional relationships to, replaced public life, becoming their only opportunity for self-expression and assertion of belonging in their domestic spaces.<sup>29</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century there was a notable struggle between the need for these material objects as well as a sense of revulsion towards such excess. Women were therefore at once expected to furnish the home with these items and criticized for it.<sup>30</sup>

Tending to outlive their older spouses, women were also far less likely to remarry than a widower, especially if they had passed the age of thirty. For this reason, widowhood tended to be an almost inescapable final life stage that slowly distanced women from what little social recognition they had enjoyed through their husbands, and thus, many women embraced the symbolic extension of marital ties public grieving offered.<sup>31</sup> By draping herself in black clothing and adorning herself in these symbols, it was thought that a woman could be shielded from scrutiny, affording her more time to dwell in her grief. The mandatorily overt and public nature of this act nonetheless contradicts the supposed benefits of this disguise. The numerous expectations associated with the mourning period included proscribed attire, even for children, and as new elements were incorporated yearly, the addition of a colour or particular piece of jewellery helped to indicate a griever's station in this process.<sup>32</sup> Adherence to this script and

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<sup>29</sup> Dara Downey, *American Women's Ghost Stories in the Gilded Age*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5-6.

<sup>30</sup> Downey, *American Women's Ghost Stories*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 230-31.

<sup>32</sup> Jen Cadwallader, "Spirit Photography and the Victorian Culture of Mourning," *Modern Language Studies* Vol. 37, No. 2 (Winter, 2008): 13. Nehama, *In Death Lamented*, 72-3.

costume was policed by other women and enormously disproportionate to that expected of men.<sup>33</sup> However, in a sense, within the impossibly complicated expectations of mourning, women found a space and terms for grieving, while quelling all ‘vulgar’ display of emotion. Through detailed descriptions made available in mourning manuals – akin to etiquette books – energy could be put into policing and observing proper mourning, allowing society to focus on the living instead of the dead. (Figs.5 and 6).<sup>34</sup>



Left **Figure 5** Unknown  
*Unidentified Girl in Mourning Dress Holding  
Framed Photograph of Her Father as a Cavalryman  
with Sword and Hardee Hat, 1861-1870*  
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



Right **Figure 6** Unknown  
*Civil War Widow, Albumen Carte de Visite, 1866-65*  
Copyright Ann Longmore-Etheridge Collection

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<sup>33</sup> Linkman, *Photography and Death*, 113. Ann Braude, *Radical Spirit: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 53. In this brilliant publication, Braude convincingly argues the association between the early women's rights movement and Spiritualism.

<sup>34</sup> McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 9, 23.

Of course, the Victorian woman's engagement with loss did not begin with the complex act of mourning, and this intimate knowledge is immortalized in the death bed accounts they penned for circulation among family who could not be present at the time of passing. Preoccupied with death as it was, Victorian society developed a glorified concept of 'a good death', idealizing a peacefully passing at home, in the company of friends and family. It was a great honour to be present bedside at this time, and there is a tone of dutiful pride to these testimonies. An inherently therapeutic process for the authors, these entries also served to soften the news for others.<sup>35</sup> In *Photography and Death*, Audrey Linkman posits that post mortem photography came to serve the same function as this poetic prose.<sup>36</sup> The illusion of calm evoked by Victorian postmortem photographs, typically displaying the body as though resting, has led some to misinterpret these as demonstrating the indifference of those accustomed to loss. (Fig.8). In *Death and Photography*, author Audrey Linkman objects to this assumption, suggesting instead that they were created out of love and a desire to remember.<sup>37</sup> The illusion of sleep offers the promise of new beginnings – countering thoughts of loss and decay – and this imagery is echoed in the inclusion of the message 'Rest In Peace' adorning most tombstones. In her compelling book, Linkman includes one particularly poignant postmortem photograph in which the photographer fails to crop the weeping mother who endeavors to prop up her child. (Fig.7).<sup>38</sup> Though seemingly unintentional, this image offers a glimpse behind the scenes into a society that aimed to elevate public grieving to the realm of the symbolic. Eagerly incorporated into a culture

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<sup>35</sup> Victorian deathbed memorials gave intimate account of final moments, therapeutic to the caregiver, they also provided a written record for the family. In 1884, Emily Harcourt wrote tried to be positive about her sister, Selina Lady Morshead's, painful death to bowel cancer. "I want you to know how the state Selina was in *mentally*, helps me on as far as the wonderfully spirituality went—all her thoughts up in Heaven with my Father—his name always in her mouth...and the last time I was with her consciously, she took my arm with hers pointing direct up said *most urgently* twice, 'Emmie, Jesus Christ'." Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 10 & 37.

<sup>36</sup> Linkman, *Photography and Death*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Linkman, *Photography and Death*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Linkman, *Photography and Death*, 58.

of commodified grieving practices, photography captured the image of those who had passed as well as displaying the bereaved in the all-important act of remembering.



**Figure 7** Unknown  
*Mourning a Dead Child*, 1865-66  
Mary Evans Picture Library, Bruce Castle Museum



bottom left: **Figure 8** Unknown  
*1/4 Plate Daguerreotype of a Beautiful Infant on a Curved Back Sofa*, c.1850  
Beverly and Jack Wilgus Collection

Postmortem photography was obviously of great interest to women but they were seldom the photographers. As this type of photography typically required the photographer to travel to the home, the simple burden of transporting heavy equipment from the studio may have been a hindrance. It could well be that the perceived hyper-sensitivity of the fairer sex was also deemed a roadblock in tackling so morbid a task, this despite their clear sustained contact with the sick and dying. An obstacle to participation in many areas of public life, the assumed feminine

emotional and spiritual sensitivity, was nonetheless an asset to other mid-nineteenth century innovations in addressing grief. In 1848, specifically through the Fox sisters of Hydesville, NY, women began to play *key* roles in the inception and popularity of Spiritualism. A religious movement which catered to the specific needs of contemporary grievers, Spiritualism responded to a population that had become dissatisfied with Christian conceptions of the afterlife.<sup>39</sup> It democratized the afterlife: all were permitted entry and regardless of their religious beliefs. This aspect appealed to women in particular who rejected the idea that their unbaptized children could be damned to hell. Spiritualism envisioned an afterlife which cared for those who had died young – soldiers, children and the many women who did not survive childbirth – and allowed for continued emotional bonds and even growth, postmortem.<sup>40</sup> Born of the Fox sisters in Hydesdale NY who first claimed to receive messages from the spiritual realm in 1848, Spiritualism was essentially a woman’s creation. However, long before the young women claimed the ability to interpret the ‘rappings’ of a deceased peddler in their home, there had been a desire to communicate with the ‘summer land’.<sup>41</sup> As Ann Braude notes in *Radical Spirits*, “The hunger for communion with the dead gave Spiritualism its content, transforming what may have been a teenage prank into a new religion. Americans wanted to talk to spirits, and they would have found a way to do it with or without Kate and Margaret Fox.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Though many found it was possible to retain their Christian faith as well. In the southern States – where for many years African religions had been incorporated into spirituality – there was greater ease in keeping both faiths concurrently. McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 10. John J. Kucich argues that Spiritualism in America precedes European contact. “Regular communication with a spirit world features prominently in Native American cultures, and Europeans and Africans brought spiritualism with them to America’s shores. John J. Kucich, *Ghostly Communion: Cross-Cultural Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2004), xi.

<sup>40</sup> Kaplan 234; Braude, 40, 41 and 52. “Women had great difficulty coming to terms with the deaths of mothers in childbirth.” Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Summerland was the Spiritualist term for the afterlife.

<sup>42</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 12.

Women were primary caregivers in the home and Spiritualism marked a move of this female authority into public life. Challenging traditional male and female roles, leadership did not depend on the positions of power or education typically unavailable to women. Spiritualist leaders – mediums – achieved status through successful interactions. Beyond capable, the stereotypical attributes of Victorian femininity – sensitive, passive – made them uniquely suited to the job and many women embraced this opportunity for financial and social independence.<sup>43</sup> Mediumship befell, almost exclusively, young women of lesser means.<sup>44</sup> As Molly McGarry discusses in *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America*, the miraculous quality of spiritual communication was enhanced by the innocence attributed to Victorian girlhood. As well, mediumship offered an enticing alternative to young women on the verge of losing, to marriage, their status as public individuals.<sup>45</sup>

### **Mumler: A Discovery, An Invention**

In the 1860's, the Spiritualist world revealed yet another practice to which women became equally integral on account of their unique ability for mediumship. Photography became the newest tool in a quest for evidence of the afterlife and a variety of applications quickly sprung up. As defined in *The Perfect Medium*, a 2005 catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, there are three categories of occult photography. 'Photographs of Spirits' are defined as the inexplicable appearance of translucent figures thought to represent the *spirit* of the departed. 'Photographs of Fluids' are images produced without a camera in which *fluids* – projections of thoughts or dreams – are believed to

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<sup>43</sup> Braude speaks of this extensively. Braude, 56; Cloutier, "Mumler's Ghosts," 14; McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 44.

<sup>44</sup> McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 29.

<sup>45</sup> McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 29.

have emanated from the medium directly onto the photographic plate. And finally, ‘Photographs of Mediums’ are described as images wherein the *medium* – and all paranormal activities that occur about them figure in the resulting image.<sup>46</sup>

There is a tendency for crossover between these categories, such as is reflected in the partnership between Georgiana Houghton and Frederick Hudson of London, who produced several photographs of spirits which nonetheless display the medium performing before the camera. The only widely known female practitioner, artist and Spiritualist, the medium Georgiana Houghton was not a spirit photographer per se, instead proclaiming herself “creative director to the experiments” of photographer Hudson who, on March 11, 1872 – a decade after Mumler – produced the first spirit photograph to appear in the UK.<sup>47</sup> A common dynamic, the objectification of women in ‘photographs of mediums’, and the attention it garners, has contributed to spirit photography’s prevailing reputation as a voyeuristic set of photographic investigations. Conducted by so-called ‘men of science’, in these sessions female mediums were observed as they exuded fluids or incited spiritual activity. Echoed by the likes of physician Jean-Martin Charcot who in 1888 photographed the display of ‘hysteria’ in his female patients, this preoccupation with the performance of eschewed feminine gender expectations was at once demeaning and empowering to women.<sup>48</sup> While all occult photography strives primarily to produce ‘evidence’ of an afterlife, only spirit photographs were provided as a commercial

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<sup>46</sup> Pierre Apraxine and Sophie Schmidt, “Photography and the Occult” in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and The Occult*, Chéroux, Clément, et al., (London: Yale University Press, 2004), 15-17.

<sup>47</sup> Active between 1859-1884, dispute as to whether or not Houghton was a spirit photographer, likely arises from the fact that she often refers to the photos of her as ‘her photographs’. In her memoirs I encountered no mention of her actually operating the camera. Jennifer Tucker discusses Houghton’s role in this process at length in *Photography as Eyewitness*, 87-98.

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot took a series of medical photographs in the early 1880s at the *Salpêtrière* Hospital in Paris and published them in three volumes entitled *Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*. More on this in Ulrich Baer, “Photography and Hysteria: Toward a Poetics of the Flash” in *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 25-60.

service, commissioned by the bereaved customer who hoped for evidence of a *specific* person.

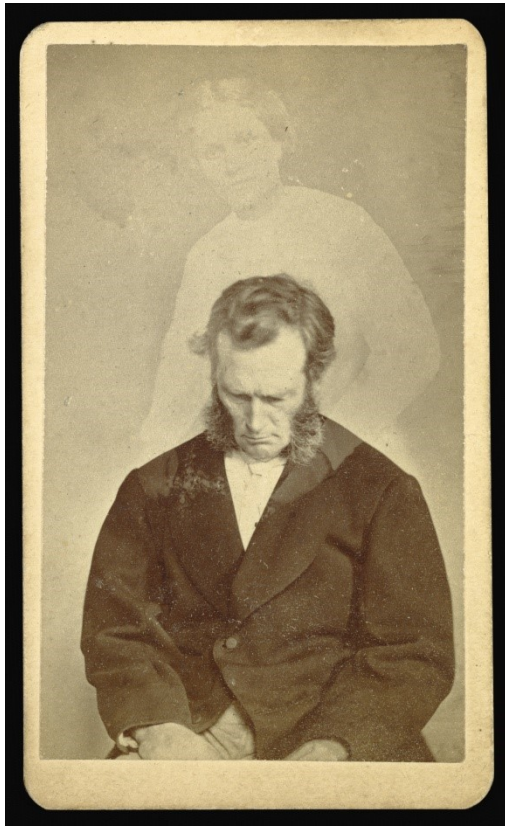
The first known spirit photograph is said to have been produced by William H. Mumler in 1861, the same year that – not coincidentally – saw the beginning of the American Civil War. Spirit photography borrowed from the language of science in order to suggest that the images could be used as an investigative tool to uncover evidence of new Spiritualist conceptions of the afterlife. In response, detractors have emphasized the technical methods through which the photographers achieved their results in hopes of exposing their deception. Eight years and many spirit photographs later, in April of 1869, Mumler was brought to court on charges of fraud. But his case never went beyond the preliminary hearing and he was acquitted on all charges. This, and the fact that his business thrived for many years thereafter, demonstrates how ultimately unimportant scientific language was to the power of these images. (Fig.9).

Accounts of Mumler's first days as spirit photographer vary greatly in their details and yet, a preferred ordering of events has emerged. This narrative has persisted relatively unchallenged, either in a desire to avoid delving further into tangled records, or simply as a reflection of the reality that the facts have been considered irrelevant to popular areas of analysis. Despite many holes and contradictions, the story as told by Mumler in his *own* memoirs tends to suffice for writers when introducing the topic of spirit photography before they proceed to perform some greater analysis of the images or phenomenon as a whole.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For example, Robert S. Cox reveals a community of Spiritualists who engaged in “the social practice of sympathy,” embracing spirit photography as a therapeutic device, a means of communication with the beyond. Imbuing the history of Spiritualism with a much needed consideration of emotion, he tracks the lives of spirit photographs as physical objects exchanged within spiritualist communities embodying “corpse, love, and faith, with sympathy as the factor governing the transaction”. Cox, *Body and Soul*, 4, 129. Two theses that investigate Mumler's career *do* question aspects of Mumler's narrative; Crista Cloutier, “Mumler's Ghosts: The Trial and Tribulations of Spirit Photography.” (MA thesis, Arizona State University, 1998). Kristy Sharpe, “A Stupendous





**Figure 9** William H. Mumler  
*Bronson Murray*, 1862-1875 & *Mrs. French*, 1862-1875  
 J. Paul Getty Museum

Louis Kaplan has compiled the most complete source of information on the topic of Mumler to date. Blending his own insights with archival writing on the topic, *The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer* provides an excellent introduction to the history of spirit photography and the existing scholarship and offers a brief overview of the Victorian zeitgeist and its receptivity to Spiritualism. Kaplan's inclusion of mid-nineteenth-century press and

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Fraud.” (MA thesis, Simmons College, Boston, May 2006). Primarily guided by questions related to the religious implications of spirit photography, Cloutier investigates the role of Mumler *and his wife* with a focus on the changing role of women in conjunction with developments in modern Spiritualism. Sharpe seems primarily concerned with defining Mumler's *motivation* for producing the spirit photographs, a detail she believes has been repeatedly overshadowed by the religious and scientific implications raised by this development.

related literature by such figures as the showman, P.T. Barnum, provides a greater understanding of the varied reception of these images by Mumler's contemporaries. At the center of this volume, Kaplan provides the original auto-biographical *Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit Photography*, 1875, a publication which has strongly shaped most histories of Mumler's career.<sup>50</sup> In closing, Kaplan offers some insightful analysis of Mumler's career – and spirit photography generally – revisiting and employing several deconstructive and psychoanalytical constructs which he dubs “spooked theories”.<sup>51</sup> Kaplan's unpacking of Mumler's claims to passive agency and that of spirit photography's potential roles within the mourning process are fascinating and pertinent to my analysis.<sup>52</sup> However, it is in what I feel is missing from this otherwise extraordinarily thorough text that I find the greatest impetus to my research.

As so much of my analysis of the development of spirit photography is wrapped up in the details that surround the earliest days of Mumler's activity, I will not rely solely on Mumler's word but will nonetheless – like others before me – provide a summary of the events as they are typically thought to have transpired. An established engraver working at Bigelow Brothers in Boston, William Howard Mumler claimed to have been alone one Sunday in March of 1861 in the photographic studios of Mrs. H. F. Stuart when he was surprised by his first spirit photograph. Having surmised something of the photographic process by observing a young man he had been in the habit of visiting at the studios, Mumler was endeavouring to produce a self-portrait when

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<sup>50</sup> These memoirs were published in seven sections, over three months, in *The Banner of Light* and then compiled and published in a book that same year. In 2008, Louis Kaplan republished this within the pages of his own book. William H. Mumler, “The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit-Photography: Written By Himself, Parts One-Seven,” *Banner of Light*, (January 9-March 27, 1875). William H. Mumler, *The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit-Photography: Written By Himself* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1875). Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler*, 69-139.

<sup>51</sup> Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler*, 215.

<sup>52</sup> In his conclusion there are two sections that have been particularly helpful to this thesis; “Mourning” and “Final Developments”. Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler*, 227-234 & 240-243.

he found he had produced what came to be known as an ‘extra’.<sup>53</sup> Inexperienced as he was, he shared the image with this same young man who assured him it was a simple case of double exposure, the plate having been insufficiently washed after its last use. A friend, almost certainly Dr. Henry F. Gardner, one of Boston’s leading Spiritualists, dropped by the office and became excited by the phenomenon.<sup>54</sup> As a joke, William went along with the gentleman’s assumption that he had produced a photograph that included a ‘spirit form’. Upon his friend’s request, William signed the back with an inscription in which he swore to the authenticity of the spirit photograph – even identifying the ‘extra’ that appeared next him as a deceased cousin – and then allowed Gardner to leave with the image.<sup>55</sup> The photograph and its inscription were leaked to New York’s spiritualist press the next day.<sup>56</sup>

In his memoirs, Mumler claims to have been somewhat embarrassed by the article but none too worried as he was ‘but a humble engraver’ back in Boston and he didn’t think the story would follow him back. But a week later, the story was published in the *Herald of Progress*’ sister paper, Boston’s *Banner of Light*.<sup>57</sup> Mortified, he returned to Stuart’s studios to apologize only to find several customers awaiting him to whom the secretary exclaimed: “Here comes Mumler”.<sup>58</sup> He photographed the expectant individuals and though sceptical about this activity, found he often succeeded in capturing a spirit extra as well. He soon became so busy, he had to quit his

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<sup>53</sup> William H. Mumler, “The Personal Experiences, Part One,” 1.

<sup>54</sup> Dr. H. F. Gardner was a popular lecturer on the Spiritualist circuit and an early supporter of Mumler. Chéroux, et al. *The Perfect Medium*, 21. In his memoirs, Mumler does not name Gardner but it is a safe assumption that this was the friend as it was he who is mentioned in the first article announcing Mumler’s discovery. “We have been placed in possession of an account of events transpiring in Boston, which give promise of opening the world a new and satisfactory phase of spiritual-manifestations. The facts, as narrated by Dr. H. F. Gardner, of Boston, are as follows:—” Charles M. Plumb, “Spirit Photographs, A New and Interesting Development,” *Herald of Progress* (November 1, 1862): 4.

<sup>55</sup> Mumler initially identifies the individual in the portrait as his cousin but he does not include this detail in his memoirs. Some suggest that this was an attempt to enhance the initial ruse. Cloutier, “Mumler’s Ghosts,” 17. Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler*, 31.

<sup>56</sup> Mumler, “The Personal Experiences, Part One,” 1. Charles M. Plumb, “Spirit Photographs,” 4.

<sup>57</sup> A. B. Child, “Spirit Photographs,” *Banner of Light* (November 8, 1862): 4.

<sup>58</sup> Mumler, “The Personal Experiences, Part One,” 1.

more profitable job as an engraver and work full time at the studios. He *had*, he argued, to charge the high fee he did for his services in order to survive.



An overnight sensation, William H. Mumler was written up extensively in Spiritualist magazines, the glue that held these isolated communities together.<sup>59</sup> Major figures within the Spiritualist Movement were quick to support this new means of communication but professional photographers deemed it blatant trickery – though none was able to mimic his signature ‘layering affect’ in which the extras seemingly embraced the sitters. (Fig.10).

**Figure 10** All Spirit Photography by William H. Mumler save the bottom right and center images by Rockwood, Cover of *Harper's Weekly*, May 8, 1869

<sup>59</sup> Ann Braude, *News from the Spirit World: A Checklist of American Spiritualist Periodicals, 1847-1900*. (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1990), 405.

By 1863, his work had become known as far away as Sydney, Australia, as the virtual fulfillment of a Spiritualist's prophecy. On June 16, 1863, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, citing an American source, reported that the discovery had been foretold a few years earlier – in the very rooms which housed the Stuart studio – by the Vermont medium, Emily Cogswell, when the words “In five years spirit-pictures will be made in this room.” appeared on her arm.<sup>60</sup>

Variations of this birth story have been retold by numerous authors, with differing degrees of emphasis on Mumler's spirit photography, his famous customers, his critics and his supporters. However, even in Kaplan's meticulous offering, he, like many other authors, makes only brief references to the two women who were proximate to Mumler's pioneering 'discovery' – Mrs. Helen F. Stuart, the professional photographer who ran the studios at 258 Washington Street, and the studio secretary, and a reputed magnetic healer since childhood, Mrs. Hannah F. Green Turner, the woman who Mumler later married. As indicated earlier, I have been pursuing a suspicion that these women may have been centrally involved in the creation of Mumler's haunted photographs. Others have speculated as to the connection between the endeavors of all three individuals, but the exact nature of the connections has been insufficiently pursued. After an enormous amount of archival research, I am finding their lives to have been far more intertwined than initially supposed.

### **Stuart: More than Spatial Muse**

In the February 26, 1869 issue of the *New York Sun*, a reporter offered a lively account of how the “wonderful mystery” of spirit photography came to be. “About eight years ago, a young lady who was what the spiritualists call a ‘medium’ kept a shop for the sale of jewellery in Boston.

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<sup>60</sup> “Ghosts Photographed Gratis,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, (June 16, 1863): 3.

One important part of her business was the weaving of hair into bracelets, locketts and similar articles, as mementoes of friends, both living and deceased.” “Usually,” the writer continued, “there was attached to these objects some provision for a photographic likeness of the person to be remembered: and at the solicitation of her customers, she undertook the taking of these likenesses ... and learned enough of the art to do it tolerably well.” Encountering some difficulties at one point, she studied the problems and “made the acquaintance of Mr. W. H. Mumler, then a silver engraver....who had some chemical knowledge, though he was inexperienced in photographing. Mr. Mumler being entirely alone one day in the photographing room, engaged in experimenting, thought he would try taking a picture. To his surprise, on developing the plate he found.... a human being dimly outlined whom he recognized as a deceased cousin.” Unfamiliar with a phenomenon he knew not,” he showed the photograph to the young lady who “instantly pronounced it to be a portrait of a spirit who has taken this method of communicating with mortals on earth.”<sup>61</sup>

Leaving intact Mumler’s invention of a new kind of photograph, the *New York Sun*’s reporter nevertheless provides the reader with a rather different version of the invention than had been supplied by accounts in Boston as early as 1862, and would be offered by Mumler a month later in his 1869 trial proceedings, as well as in his memoirs of 1875. First, the “young lady” was not a passive bystander, a woman whose only serious role was to provide the premises that became the site for something akin to a miracle. She was instead an active practitioner of two of the visual arts, someone who worked hard to bring those two art forms together in the cause of memory, and someone who went out to seek knowledge when her understanding of photographic

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<sup>61</sup> “A Wonderful Mystery: Ghosts Sitting for their Portraits,” *The New York Sun* (February 26 1869), 2. Republished in *Human Nature : A Monthly Journal of Zoistic Science* (June 1869), 302-306.



processes was confounded. That she was also said by the newspaper reporter to be a medium and ‘namer’ of the new phenomenon will be returned to later in this thesis.

Some of what was recorded by the *New York Sun* accords well with the general outlines of the oft-described profile for Helen F. Stuart and with contemporary documentation of professional practitioners of jewelry and photography in Boston. A Mrs. A.M. Stuart was listed in both the 1859-1860 and 1860-1861 Boston directories as an “artist in hair” and “hairwork manufacturer,” working out of 191 Washington Street.<sup>62</sup> The *Boston Almanac* of 1860 showed her to be one of only two women listed among sixteen such professionals who practiced a craft that many agree to have been dominated by women.<sup>63</sup> From 1861 through 1865, the city’s directories identify Mrs. H. F. Stuart – certainly the same woman – working out of Washington Street (first at 221 and then 258), as a manufacturer of “hairwork” or “hair jewelry”. The 1864 Boston directory places her, at the same address, among several dozen personal or company names presented in the “Business Directory” section entitled “Photographists, etc.”<sup>64</sup> Listed as Mrs. H. F. Stuart, she is the only individual to be clearly ‘marked’ as a woman.

To date, there has been no jewellery clearly identified with Stuart’s activities as a “hair artist”, as pieces tended to bear only the names of the individuals they memorialized. Sarah Nehama, specialist in hair jewelry, assured me that few pieces were *ever* signed by the artists involved.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The initials ‘A.M.’ have not led to knowledge of a spouse. City Directory, (Boston Massachusetts ,1860), 164. City Directory, (Boston Massachusetts ,1861), 150.

<sup>63</sup> Geoffrey Batchen confirms that, although “not an exclusively feminine activity, it was certainly dominated by women.” Batchen. *Forget me Not*, 68. Oddly, the only other woman listed under ‘hairwork’ in the 1859-1860 Boston Directory, S. C. Thayer, was working from the same address, 191 Washington Street.

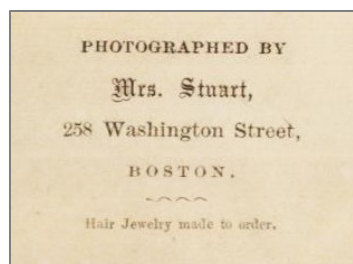
<sup>64</sup> “Photographists, etc. City Directory, (Boston Massachusetts ,1864), 251. She is, however, purported to have been listed as a photographer from 1864-65 at 258 Washington. We can deduce that she was still engaged in the production of hair jewellery during these years as she continues to advertise these services at the back of each cdv. Chris Steele and Ronald Polito, *A Directory of Massachusetts Photographers*, 1839-1900 (Camden: Picton Press, 1993), 127.

<sup>65</sup> Co-curator of the 2012 Massachusetts Historical Society Exhibition, *In Death Lamented*, Sarah Nehama expressed the difficulty in identifying the artists in an email June 25, 2014. Batchen deduces from the many advertisements

Yet its importance to Stuart, perhaps for financial reasons, is clearly indicated on the backstamps of many of the cdvs she made as a photographer. (Fig.11). Foregoing the customary inclusion of ‘photographer’ after her name, on the back of each carte, she boldly asserted that they had been ‘photographed by’ her. Many portrait photographers included contact information and the reminder that copies could ‘*always* be procured’ in order to profit from reprints post mortem. However, Stuart used this powerful advertising space to note her production of hair jewelry, securing her grieving clients’ business should they have the means for these popular luxury items which were so often associated with loss *and* often incorporated a photographic portrait.<sup>66</sup> Eventually, hair jewellery that incorporates positively identified photography by Stuart may



surface, revealing her handiwork. In order to facilitate this recognition, an inventory of her work must be amassed, no small task, for Stuart was a rather prolific photographer, leaving behind a vast collection of cdvs which reside in museums and continue to be traded among collectors.<sup>67</sup>



**Fig 11** Mrs. Helen F. Stuart  
*Portrait of Unidentified Woman with Backstamp*, c. 1861-65  
Author's Private Collection

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they took out, that this jewelry must have been a staple of photographers. Geoffrey Batchen. *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>66</sup> Of course, not all hair jewelry was intended for mourning however, hair was also employed in *sentimental* jewellery, to be exchanged between lovers. Nehama, *In Death Lamented*, 24.

<sup>67</sup> Photographic Historian Michelle Lalumière notes that Mrs. H. F. Stuart was “one of Boston’s most prolific photographers.” Michelle Lalumière, “Early Photography: Commercial Portraiture,” *Fields of Vision, Women in Photography*, Tom Beck, Michelle Lalumière and Cynthia Wayne. (Baltimore: Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery, 1995), 11. Despite the apparent magnitude of her oeuvre, her career as a whole – her straight portraiture and spirit photographs – has been sadly neglected by photo historians.



As is hardly surprising for anyone entering the world of photography in the early 1860s in the United States, cdvs of those directly involved in the Civil War form part of her known practice. Three cdvs of named soldiers from the 56<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Infantry Regiment are held by the Massachusetts Historical Society, and others have been identified through EBay. (Figs.12 and 13). They too have backstamps which take the opportunity to mention her hairwork.



**Fig 12** Mrs. H. F. Stuart  
*56 Mass. Volunteer Infantry Regiment Photographs ca. 1861-1865.*  
 left to right: Sergeant Major George H. Weeks, c. 1864-65; Sergeant Major Daniel F. French, 1864;  
 Sargent Charles W. Boyer, c.1864-65.  
 Massachusetts Historical Society



**Fig 13** Mrs. H. F. Stuart  
*Soldiers, c.1861-1865*  
 Ebay.ca

The quality of Mrs. H. F. Stuart's photographic work seems to move beyond the 'tolerable' level of skill she was afforded in the *New York Sun* article. Though the writer was referring to her earliest photographic work, as there is evidence only of rather accomplished work by Mrs. Stuart – dating as early as 1862 – one wonders if the unnamed reporter ever laid eyes on her cdvs.

However, for the purposes of a consideration of the development of spirit photography perhaps the greatest 'gift' the 1869 text provides is its reminder of the perceived power of combining hair and photography into a memory device. The pairing of visual representation – the portrait – with an additional indexical referent – the hair – made for an extremely potent object. Cheaper than the painted portrait, photographs also possess the aforementioned *indexical* relationship to the sitter that echoes that of hair. This "doubled indexicality" is described by Geoffrey Batchen in his book, *Forget me Not*.<sup>68</sup> As mentioned earlier, that light must literally touch the sitter in order to produce the photographic portrait means it should already possess the sympathetic magic that the hair provided. And yet, as they are joined together in the jewelry, there is a sense that the maker, or individual who commissioned the memento, felt that there was something lacking of each independent component.<sup>69</sup> As Roland Barthes notes in *Camera Lucida*, the photograph is evidence of presence not of appearance.<sup>70</sup> This in mind, Batchen suggests that the inclusion of a tactile component such as hair might be an effort "to bridge the distance, temporal or otherwise, between viewer and person viewed, as well as between likeness and subject."<sup>71</sup>

The 'extra' that appeared in spirit photographs performed a similar function. Incorporated into the emulsion as it were, this indication of the lingering body acts much like the tactile addition of

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<sup>68</sup> Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 74.

<sup>69</sup> Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 31.

<sup>70</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Richard Howard trans., (London: Vintage Books, 2000), 102-103.

<sup>71</sup> Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 34.

hair that is often nestled under glass, both out of reach and yet *present*. Spirit photography thus becomes a powerful double index bridging the temporal distance between the sitter-turned-viewer and the person they long for. Thus, I propose that spirit photography represents a kind of hybrid of both photographic portraiture and hair jewelry – the two services Mrs. Helen F. Stuart is irrefutably documented to have offered – how could she have *avoided* contributing to its inception in her studios? Indeed, Stuart *did* produce spirit photographs. (Figs.14 and 15).



**Figure 14** Helen F. Stuart  
*Woman at Table with Male Spirit*, c. 1865  
Clements Library

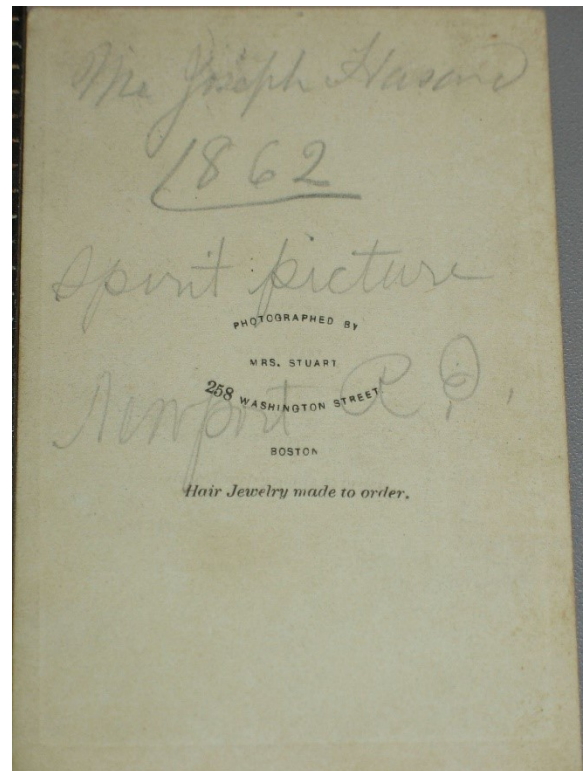


**Figure 15** Helen F. Stuart  
*Unidentified Man with Accompanying "Spirit"*,  
c. 1862 – 1865  
Boston Athenæum



## Bodies of Work

In each of Stuart's positively attributed spirit photographs the living model is seated and the spiritual extra is standing to his or her right behind the same wooden table with a white marble top. In the Clements Library cdv, the female sitter looks to the camera and her male extra holds a guitar. The Boston Athenæum's cdv portrays a man gazing off camera, nearly in the same direction as his accompanying female extra, who rests her hand casually upon his arm. Though both institutions assign only approximate dates to their cdvs, a recent EBay auction suggests that the Athenæum cdv, now with an identification for the sitter, can be positively dated 1862. (Fig.16).



**Figure 16** Mrs. Helen F. Stuart  
Spirit Photograph of *Mr. Joseph Hazard, Newport Rhode Island, 1862*  
Ebay.ca



Left and Center: **Figure 17** Attributed to William H. Mumler  
*Spirit Photo of Man and Three Spirits, c.1872 & Spirit Photo of Man and Three Spirits, c.1875. (Vignetting Phase)*  
Right: **Figure 18** William H. Mumler  
*Spirit Photo of Man and Female Spirit, c.1872.*  
All from Clements Library

While neither of Stuart's spirit photographs predates Mumler's apparent 1861 debut, they do demonstrate clear similarities in style and technique to what I will propose to be his earliest work. In fact, there is reason to question whether some of her work has been wrongfully attributed to Mumler based on this resemblance as well as the recurrence of certain props.<sup>72</sup> One notable difference between their portrait styles is Mumler's tendency, throughout his career, to crop in tighter on his subjects than Stuart. However, the manner in which he presents his extras is fairly inconsistent, his style seeming to evolve with time. The spiritual extras in some of what have been called his spirit photographs – namely two *unsigned* cdvs residing at The Clements Library – closely resemble hers stylistically. (Fig.17). These two cdvs have been attributed to Mumler on account of their resemblance to another *backstamped* cdv in their collection which was shot at his West Springfield studios, therefore c.1872. (Fig.18).<sup>73</sup> However, the extras

<sup>72</sup> As many assumptions about Mumler's oeuvre were made before her spirit photography began to garner much attention, it is unsurprising that the potential for shared props was overlooked. In our correspondence of March 31, 2015, Robert S. Cox agreed with my hypothesis that some of her work may have been mistaken for Mumler's.

<sup>73</sup> In an email dated July 17, 2014, Clayton Lewis, curator of Graphics Material, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan wrote: "Our attribution of the two unmarked cdvs to Mumler was a bit speculative, made

present themselves in a manner that is far from what can be considered his signature style, (as represented in Figs.9 and 22). Indeed, as they lack a clearly defined body, they bear a closer resemblance to those of Stuart, bridging a stylistic connection between their work and supporting the theory put forward by Kaplan that she may have offered him instruction.<sup>74</sup>

Few of Stuart's photographs or Mumler's spirit photographs are dated. However, as there is no record of Stuart before ca. 1860's, we can reasonably situate her work within the timeframe of 1859-67. While proving with authority which of Mumler's spirit photographs were his first might not be possible, I have ventured to date them by grouping the images into four distinct stages, ordered in their most likely evolution.<sup>75</sup> In the earliest, the *Vignetting Phase*, wispy extras often appear in multiple, the heads disembodied. (Figs.17 and 19).<sup>76</sup> In his *Experimental Phase*, more of the extra's body emerges as he begins cropping sitter's to the side to free up space, improving exposure and portrait quality. (Figs.20 and 21). The third and fourth phases may have occurred concurrently. In the third stage, his *Layering Phase*, we see what has really come to be known as his signature spirit photograph. (Fig.22). The fourth, his *Correspondence Phase*, is an unusual period in which he provided his services to griever without need for them to be present. (Figs.23 and 27).<sup>77</sup> In this final phase, no sitter is physically present; the client appears in a photograph that rests on the table next to the spiritual extra who instead dominates the frame.

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from the fact that they came from the same source, one is of the same man that appears on a card with the Mumler backstamp, and the similarity in pose and appearance of the spirits. This is a bit soft as attributions go, but I think correct."

<sup>74</sup> Elaborated on page 49 and in footnote 94.

<sup>75</sup> To my knowledge, nobody has ever ventured to identify which of Mumler's edvs were his earliest.

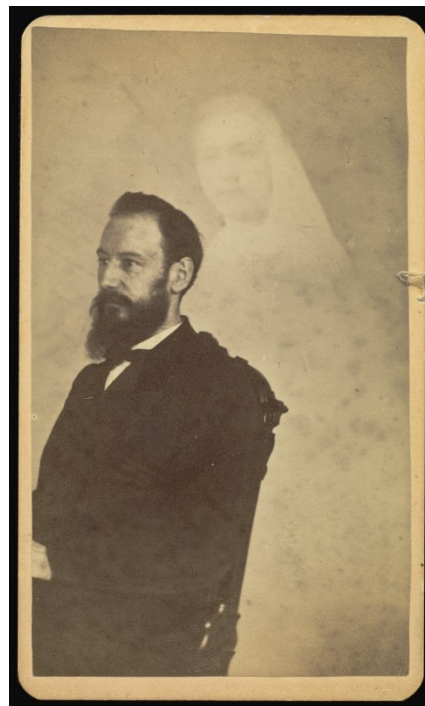
<sup>76</sup> Examples of these are all without backstamp. Two at the Clements library 'attributed' to Mumler, 'Spiritualism and Spirit Photos #3&4, object # 1968.0325.0001, 2, 21, 28, 29 from Eastman which are unattributed and likely those which Dobran and Meinwald discussed.

<sup>77</sup> "To persons at a distance desirous of obtaining a Spirit Photograph. I would inform that it is not actually necessary for them to be present. For full information address, with two 3-cent stamps, W.H. Mumler, 170 West Springfield street, Boston, Mass. Seances Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings." Advertisement for "W. H. Mumler, Spirit Photographer," *Banner of Light* (October 23, 1869):5.





**Figure 19** Unidentified. Dobran and Meinwald considered this potential work by Mumler. (*Vignetting Phase*) Unidentified seated man with 3 "spirit faces" behind him, ca. 1865; Unidentified seated man faces" of woman and man behind him, ca. 1865; Unidentified seated woman with 3 "spirit faces" behind her., ca. 1865; Unidentified seated young man with four "spirit faces" behind him, ca.1865.  
George Eastman House



Above: **Figure 20** Unidentified. Dobran and Meinwald considered this potential work by Mumler. *(Experimental Phase) Unidentified seated woman with 1 "spirit face" behind her, ca. 1865 & Unidentified seated middle-aged woman with "spirit" of young man behind her, ca. 1880*  
George Eastman House

Below: **Figure 21** William H. Mumler *(Experimental Phase)*  
*Mrs. French, ca. 1862-75 & Unidentified Bearded Man Seated, A Female "Spirit" in the Background, ca. 1862-75*  
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles





Above: **Figure 22** William H. Mumler (*Layering Phase*)  
*Harry Gordon, 1862-1875 & Mrs. Tinkham, 1862-1875*  
 The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Below: **Figure 23** William H. Mumler (*Correspondence Phase*)  
*Female "Spirit" Standing Next to a Table with a Photograph Propped Against a Vase with Flowers, 1862-1875 & Mr. Chapin, Oil Merchant and His Spirit Wife and Babe Recognized, 1862-1875*  
 The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Through deductive reasoning, these groupings of Mumler's spirit photography can be chronologically characterized. His *Correspondence* services could have only been in demand once his business was established and we can date these in relation to the advertisements he ran in Spiritualist papers such as *The Banner of Light*, on October 9, 16 and 23, 1869.<sup>78</sup> Mumler became known in particular for his spirit photographs wherein he used a *Layering* effect that gave the appearance of physical interaction with the extras, such as arms wrapping around the sitters. These images – considered very difficult if not impossible to replicate by his contemporaries – seem to demonstrate a real evolution of his technique and logically must be his later work. Images belonging to *Mumler's Layering Phase* bore the backstamp of the West Springfield studios that according to public records, he occupied from 1869-78, concurrent with his running of the advertisements for the *Correspondence* images and towards the end of his foray into spirit photography. The remaining two phases must therefore have preceded this: also as they do not demonstrate the technical achievement that is attained in these two final stages.

Important to note is that none of the spirit photographs belonging to his *Vignetting* phase, and few from the *Experimental* grouping, are backstamped. That they are likely his earliest in that the inclusion of his name was not yet a selling point is obvious and follows as well what has been observed above. More importantly, there is little way of assuring that they are actually his at all. However, because many experts have identified them to be spirit photographs *by* William Mumler they must be included in any discussion of his work. Indeed, as the *Vignetting* cdvs are so unlike his later work, they potentially reveal his learning process and early influences. I have

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<sup>78</sup> "Spirit Photographs! Residents residing ...potential clients are informed that it is not actually necessary for them to be present" and that they should address all requests to William Mumler at 170 West Springfield St. in Boston." Advertisement sections of *The Banner of Light*, October 9, 16 and 23, 1869.

assigned the title of *Experimental* to those few images that seem to bridge a gap between these and what becomes his signature *Layering Phase*.

Evidence points to Stuart employing more advanced techniques to her imagery, with greater adeptness, earlier than Mumler. The Clements Library holds what may be the earliest of his cdvs to demonstrate an attempt at the aforementioned layering technique and it is confidently dated 1872 on account of the 'West Springfield' backstamp. (Fig.18). Also in their collection are two more spirit photographs which have been attributed to Mumler – and assigned the years 1872 and 75 – solely upon the seeming reappearance of the male sitter who appears on their backstamped Mumler cdv. (Fig.17).<sup>79</sup> Otherwise dissimilar in their manner of displaying the extras, they seem to bear a closer resemblance to Stuart's spirit photography, one of which also resides in The Clements Library Collection. (Fig.14). Overall, her backstamped spirit photograph has a cleaner more technically refined appearance than any of the three by/attribution to Mumler and is dated five years earlier than these. As her cdv has no accompanying biographical information, I presume that this date has been assigned based on the fact that she was advertising her photographic services for only the years 1864-65. While Mumler is indeed credited with having produced spirit photographs earlier than this date, not one of his existing *attributed* cdvs are positively dated earlier than 1865.<sup>80</sup> The early date of her image, the superior technical achievement and disparity from what became Mumler's signature style lead me to the conclusion that these earliest efforts of Mumler's must have been attempts at emulating the work of Mrs. H. F. Stuart.

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<sup>79</sup> Of note, in these two images there is an unusual chair which appear to have tassels hanging about the back and armrests. Chairs like this appear in cdvs attributed to Mumler which exist only in etching, appearing on the cover of *Harper's Weekly*, May 8, 1869, figure 10.

<sup>80</sup> As a matter of fact, I have encountered only one of his positively attributed cdvs dated c.1865. *Herbert Wilson with the Spirit of a Young Lady to Whom He Had Once Been Engaged*, resides at the George Eastman House. Incidentally, on page 116 of his book *The Strange Case of William Mumler*, Kaplan includes this image with the dates c.1870-75. All other existing, *positively* attributed cdvs of Mumler's are dated after 1869.

The almost disembodied heads that appear as ‘extras’ in both her spirit photograph and in those of Mumler’s *Vignetting Phase* bring to mind the vignette style that Stuart might have printed for use within lockets, as well as the technique employed to crop an individual out of group portraits for the purposes of a memorial or death announcement cdv.<sup>81</sup> Interestingly enough, I encountered three such vignetted portraits by Mrs. H. F. Stuart, two on Ebay and another at the Boston Athenæum; although the end to which they were produced is not known, their existence demonstrates that she was in the habit of manipulating images this way. (Fig.24). Also in the Athenæum’s collection, her second spirit photograph includes an extra that seems to rest her arm on the gentleman sitter. (Fig.15). Therefore, not only was Stuart producing an overall superior product both with regards to exposure and cropping, but she also potentially demonstrates his signature layering affect before he does.<sup>82</sup>



**Figure 24** All by Mrs. Stuart

Left: *Unidentified Woman*, 1862-1865

Boston Athenæum

Center and Right: *Captain Morton 58<sup>th</sup> Mass* , 1862-1865 & *Civil War CDV Photo and Tax Stamp*, 1865.  
EBay.ca

<sup>81</sup> Though her extra gentleman appears as a floating head with collar, to his left there appears the hint of a guitar which can be interpreted as though being held in his hand – were there one – furthest from the sitter. Mumler later provides his extras with identifying props as well.

<sup>82</sup> Mumler’s layering affect, though it becomes more elaborate with regards to the interaction with the sitter, has a cartoonish quality to it. The face remains photographic whereas the bodies appear constructed.





**Figure 25** Mrs. Stuart

Left and center, examples of  $\frac{3}{4}$  and full length cropping. 1861-67. Boston Public Library

Right, example of gentleman with full length cropping. 1861-67. Author's Personal Collection



**Figure 26** Mrs. Stuart

*Various Portraits with Table*, 1861-67.

Boston Athenæum



**Figure 27** William H. Mumler

*Various Correspondence Portraits*, 1862-75.

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Last in row from Eastman House)

In her spirit photographs, Stuart deliberately crops her sitters in such a way as to leave room to the side and above for the extra, and Mumler exaggerates this technique in all his work as of his *Experimental Phase*. Stuart's tendency to shoot the full length of her models was a deliberate tactic employed to display the full skirts of Victorian women or uniforms of military men. (Fig.25). Some of her portraits do employ a tighter,  $\frac{3}{4}$  length cropping, but they are far less crude than Mumler's spirit photographs where the sitter's garments were of minimal importance.<sup>83</sup> Another more factual crossover between their work can be observed in the recurrence of certain props, and this is no surprise because his first images were taken in her studios. What is curious however, is the fact that some of her furniture – namely the heavily carved wooden table used in much of her portraiture – continues to appear in his images produced in the eighteen seventies, long after his alliance with Mrs. H. F. Stuart had ended. (Figs.26 and 27).<sup>84</sup> More of Stuart's spirit photography is likely to be in circulation. However, beyond the confirmed two, I have so far only encountered a potential third which appeared in an article written in 1978 by John Dobran for *Northlight* magazine, "The Spirits of Mumler, Part 2".<sup>85</sup> (Fig.28). Notably, the chair appearing in this image is identical to that employed by Stuart in her spirit photograph owned by the Clements Library. This chair, with an open back with relief carvings and turnings, turned front legs and upholstered seat, was also employed in at least thirty-three of her straight portraits.<sup>86</sup> Unlike Stuart's two confirmed spirit photographs, in this image, Stuart's marble topped table has been removed, freeing-up the frame for more of the two extras' bodies – a man

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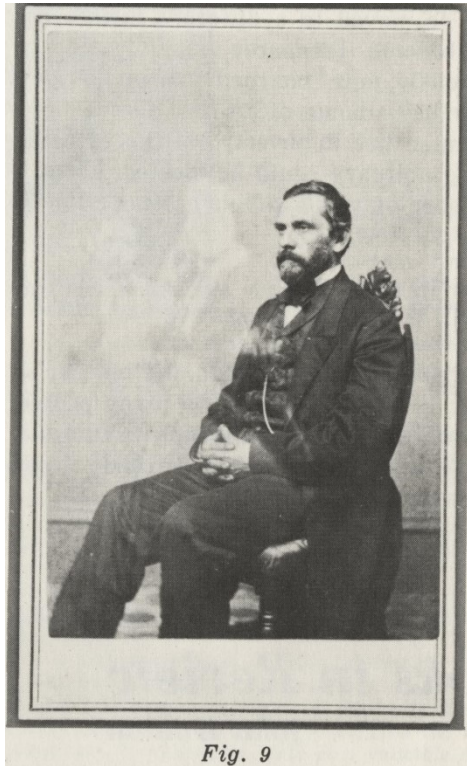
<sup>83</sup> The two images residing at the Boston Public Library are perfect examples of her full length and  $\frac{3}{4}$  length crops. In that of the gentleman, we see a greater resemblance to Mumler's cdvs.

<sup>84</sup> There seems to have been two tables at Stuart's studios, one had a white marble top and the other had drop accents at the base of the table. This second table is the same one he later employed at his studios on West Springfield.

<sup>85</sup> John Dobran, "The Spirits of Mumler, Part II," *Northlight* 1978. V.5, no.3 (Fall 1978): 12.

<sup>86</sup> Twenty of these are in the collection of the Boston Athenæum.

and a woman.<sup>87</sup> Closer to the gentleman sitter, the female extra overlaps the sitter's chest with her hand – turned palm up – as if preparing to cup his pocket watch.<sup>88</sup>



**Figure 28** Mrs. Stuart  
*Carte de Visite of Unidentified Man; A. Heatlie Collection,*  
 c.1861-67.  
*Northlight* 1978. V.5, no.3 (Fall 1978): 13.

(Note: This scan courtesy of Jack and Beverly Wilgus.)

*Fig. 9*

<sup>87</sup> Though Stuart usually used the wooden table that Mumler later adopts, this marble topped-table also appears in many of her cdvs.

<sup>88</sup> Entitled by Dobran simply “*Carte de Visite* of unidentified man; A. Heatlie Collection,” this image had a stamp on the back – and perhaps some unmentioned additional inscription – which led the author to conclude that Stuart “sold Mumler spirit cartes while Mumler still practiced as an engraver in Boston before going to New York.” Dobran, “The Spirits of Mumler, Part II,” 12. This potential third of Stuart’s spirit photographs most closely resembles the later work of Mumler and I am eager, of course, to know what additional information led to Dobran’s inference. Sadly, the author did not elaborate any further and he has since passed away. As my only copy of the article and its embedded image was a high contrast photocopy of the Boston Athenæum’s photocopy that Katarina Slaughterback kindly shared with me during my visit, deciphering anything more than the sitter was difficult. After a great deal of searching I did manage to locate Andrew Heatlie but he had long ago sold the cdv at a trade show and could not even recall which state this had occurred in, let alone the current owner. Andrew J. Heatlie, email message to author, January 18, 2015. Until the cdv resurfaces, a high resolution scan direct from an original edition of the journal, graciously provided to me by collectors Jack and Beverly Wilgus, only ten minutes after my initial request on June 9, 2015, will have to suffice. (Fig.28) The very generous Beverly and Jack Wilguses are photographers, computer artists and collectors. [www.brightbytes.com](http://www.brightbytes.com).

Appearing in the same edition of *Northlight* magazine that contained the Dobran article, is a letter to the editor, presumably in response to the aforementioned previously published first half of the article, in which the author had included some reference to and illustrations of Mumler's cdvs in the Wagstaff Collection.<sup>89</sup> Written by Dan Meinwald in his time as an intern at the Eastman House, the letter asked for help in attributing their unidentified spirit photographs that resemble those pictured and even contained the same tables. Editor to *Northlight* at that time, Dobran follows Meinwald's letter with a note in which he shared that they had been able to confirm, over the phone, that the Eastman House images were "undoubtedly" by Mumler. Meinwald likely had no prior knowledge of Stuart's spirit photography, but I find it curious that Dobran did not consider the possibility that Stuart, mentioned in his adjoining article, might be the author of the unmarked images at Eastman House.<sup>90</sup> In closing his 1978 letter to the editor, Meinwald specifically asks: "Is there anything which distinguishes identified from unidentified photographs in the Wagstaff album?" The answer is yes. There are tiny stars above the head of the extras in the two *Correspondence*-style cdvs which are not encountered in any other Mumler images, and the third cdv displays none of Mumler's signature overlap but instead, as mentioned, potentially indicates that the maker was just mastering their technique. This last cdv is one of a few I had designated to Mumler's *Experimental Phase* – even before I was aware it lacked a

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<sup>89</sup> Now housed at the Getty Museum and available to the public by open access.

<sup>90</sup> Dobran uses the presence of repeated props as a means of attributing the images to Mumler, overlooking the fairly obvious possibility of these being shared between two individuals working from the same studios. Furthermore, three of the spirit photographs attributed to William Mumler in the Wagstaff Collection, which are now housed at the Getty Museum, are unmarked. Two of these unmarked cdvs are *Correspondence* spirit photographs that resemble others produced by Mumler. (Fig.29). However, this means that they include Stuart's table, an element Meinwald interpreted as an identifying link between Eastman and Wagstaff's collections. In correspondence with me, Joe Struble, former collections manager at Eastman House, acknowledged Meinwald's suspicion that the unmarked images may have been Mumler's work. However, contrary to what Dobran had led his readers to believe, Struble confirmed that the cdvs discussed by Dobran and Meinwald remain unattributed. Joe Struble, email message to author, April 2, 2015. These cdvs all belonging to an album purchased from Robert A. Sobieszek. Ross Knapper, the current collections manager at Eastman House confirmed that in fact only three of the spirit photographs in their collection have been positively attributed to Mumler. Ross Knapper, email message to author, April 10, 2015.



backstamp – and it is the one that most resembles the many unattributed spirit cdvs at Eastman House presumed, but only presumed, to be Mumler's. (Fig.30).



**Figure 29** Attributed to William H. Mumler

*Female "spirit" with Carte-de-Visite on a Table Propped Against an Album, 1862-1875 & Female "spirit" with three male "spirits" next to Table with a Cabinet Card Propped Against an Album*

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

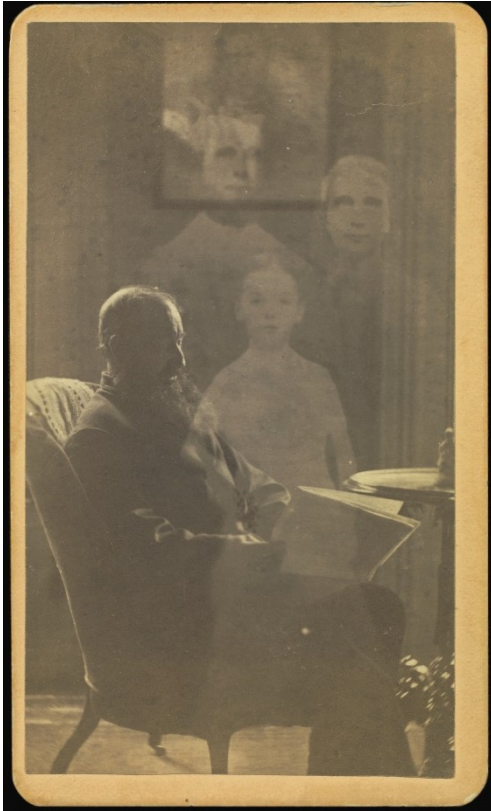


**Figure 30** Attributed to William H. Mumler

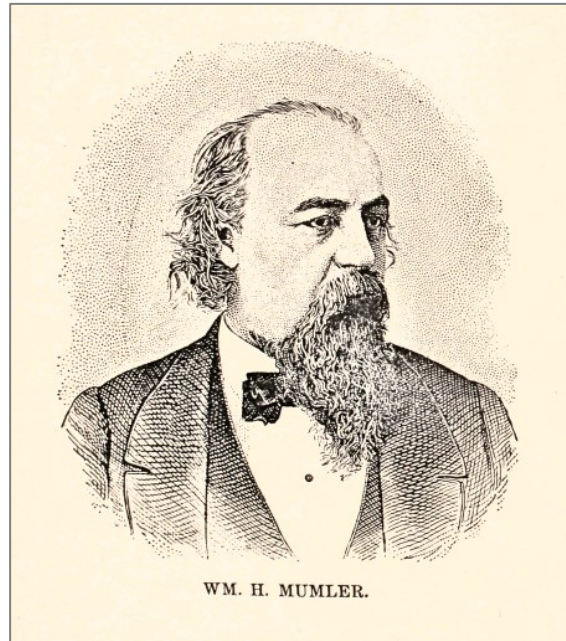
*Unidentified Man with Muttonchops Seated Arms Crossed, a Female "Spirit" in the Background, 1862-1875*  
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

#### *Experimental Phase*

(Note: Kaplan identifies this man as Charles Livermore likely based on his resemblance to two other images appearing on the cover of *Harper's Weekly*, figure 14. Assuming it was from the same session, we can date this pre-1869.)



Left **Fig 31** William H. Mumler  
*Unidentified Man with a Long Beard Seated with Three "Spirits"*, 1862-1875  
 J. Paul Getty Museum



Right **Fig 32** Unknown  
*Portrait of WM. H. Mumler*  
 Cover of *Harper's Weekly*, May 8, 1869

One of Mumler's attributed cdvs in the Getty collection is remarkably different from any other, bears an early date and fuels my suspicion that Stuart may have taught Mumler and, in the 1860s, acted as collaborator to his images. Entitled *Unidentified Man with a Long Beard Seated with Three "Spirits"*, this one employs a very different technique, one that inevitably required the participation of a knowing collaborator as opposed to client. (Fig.31). Here the sitter appears in profile, backlit, with a strong hairlight and soft fill.<sup>91</sup> While these conditions would have seemed

<sup>91</sup> The hairlight skims the hairline to give depth to an image, assuring that there is definition between the sitter and the backdrop. The positioning of the main light source determines the shadow patterning of the portrait – ie: side, beauty or rembrandt lighting. The fill light is generally positioned near the camera, pointed directly at the sitter, in order to soften or 'fill' the shadows created by the main. The relationship between these two light sources – main and fill – will determine the overall contrast of an image.

unusual to any client visiting Mumler's studios for a 'standard' spirit photograph – to be sitting in profile, essentially in the dark – this sitter nonchalantly leafs through a newspaper.

Furthermore, unlike all other spirit photographs, this one seems to have been shot outside the studio in a personal library. Based on these peculiarities and the striking resemblance between the sitter and the only existent image of Mumler (Fig.32), I have concluded that the model is William H. Mumler himself – either a self-portrait or shot *by* someone else in his orbit.<sup>92</sup> Such an image might have served as a promotional piece for Mumler – or potentially another bearded Spiritualist personality – displaying the man at rest who is nonetheless perpetually surrounded by the spirits who endeavour to communicate through him.

Perhaps Mrs. H. F. Stuart took the photograph of the man and his companions in the library. She ran the studios at 258 Washington Street where William H. Mumler took his first spirit photographs and there is evidence to suggest that she was already an active photographer at this time. At present there are two images that suggest her activity in 1862; the aforementioned spirit photograph of Joseph Hazard and a second cdv located on EBay. (Fig.33). This second cdv, the only I have encountered thus far of a child as sitter, included the inscription: George Bliss Rogers Aged 4 years 10 months February 20/62.”<sup>93</sup> These inscriptions aside, as her photographic services were listed for two years, we can confirm that by 1864 she was an accomplished and prolific photographer who produced at least two positively identified spirit photographs as well. Stuart's spirit photographs – which display some of what became Mumler's signature technique – predate any of his surviving backstamped images by nearly five years. The only cdvs by Mumler that we can date with confidence are those shot after 1869 upon his return to Boston

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<sup>92</sup> However, be this the case, some artistic licence has been employed in the drawn portrait in order to straighten an otherwise turned nose.

<sup>93</sup> Public records confirm that a George Bliss Rogers was born in Boston May 3, 1857. *Births Registered in the City of Boston for the Year 1857*, no.3623.

when he took up at his West Springfield studios. All the other spirit cdvs attributed to Mumler – the *Vignetting and Experimental* cdvs which are potentially contemporaneous to Stuart’s spirit



cdvs – simply do not match hers in technical achievement. Only one hypothesis explains their similarity in style, his presence at the studios on a Sunday, his sudden photographic ability and her later efforts to secure his business to her studios. She must have been his teacher.

**Figure 33** Mrs. Stuart,  
*George Bliss Rogers Aged 4 years 10 months*  
*February 20/62.*  
EBay.ca

As mentioned earlier, Louis Kaplan has somewhat elliptically pointed to the possibility that she instructed Mumler, at least in “photographic technique”.<sup>94</sup> My inclination is to take a wider view of her role as instructor, although as Mrs. Stuart had only taken up photography a short while before Mumler is said to have made his exciting discovery, there is need to question how Stuart herself became an accomplished photographer in such a short order.<sup>95</sup> How came she to be so skilled? For now, there is only speculation.<sup>96</sup> Whatever the source of her instruction, Stuart

<sup>94</sup> Kaplan, *The Strange Case*, 14. Crista Cloutier claims outright that “During the spring of 1861, Mumler spent each Sunday at Mrs. H. F. Stuart’s Photographic Gallery learning the wet-plate negative photography process.” However, this leaves open the possibility that there was another individual acting as instructor. Crista Cloutier, “Mumler’s Ghosts,” *The Perfect Medium: Photography and The Occult*. (London: Yale University Press, 2004), 20.

<sup>95</sup> Tucker, *Photography as Eyewitness*, 252.

<sup>96</sup> Thank you to Catherine MacKenzie for the potential clue she found in the “Passengers” Section of the *Boston Post*, August 23, 1860. A Mrs. A. M. Stuart of Chelsea was among those to board the steamer *Europa* for Liverpool. A “Passenger Manifest Search (1848-1891)” at *The Massachusetts Archives* reveals that a ‘Mrs. A. Stuart’ returned aboard *The Conquest* August 1, 1862.<sup>96</sup> It should be noted that the ages of both these women are off by just a few years. However, if Stuart *had* traveled to Liverpool at this time she would have been able to partake of photographic instruction from some of the foremost leaders in the medium at the The London School of Photography. Operated by Samuel Prout Newcombe, the school had seven locations and from 1859-1865, one of these was in Liverpool at 36 Church Street. The Liverpool Photographic Society was also based in this city from the mid-fifties to 1864 and in 1860, George Shadbolt was editor to the associated journal. Shadbolt was an avid proponent of microphotography, photographic enlarging and combination printing. He was also president of the Royal Microscopical Society and said to have produced the first microphotograph. Tucker, *Photography as Eyewitness*, 33.

appears to have recognized a growing market for photographic portraits and the relationship these had to her hair work. An astute businesswoman, Stuart was a remarkable professional, given the era in which she lived; it is more than worth remarking that she was the only woman listed among seventy-four 'photographists' in the 1864 Boston Directory. This of course does not indicate that there were no female photographers, but their scarcity is evident.

Indeed, women were encouraged to pursue photography, especially those genres deemed overtly sentimental, thus, feminine in nature.<sup>97</sup> Employed as retouchers, studio and lab assistants, some women even went into the business of portraiture on their own, although a review of American cdvs produced between 1840-90 reveals female photographers to account for less than 2%.<sup>98</sup> Although their names were seldom those stamped on the back of the cdv, many women worked in various facets of the industry, often alongside their husbands, taking over the business in the case of death or divorce.<sup>99</sup> The presence of a 'lady' was considered a selling point and this detail was often included in advertisements. As it was primarily women and babies who sat for cdvs, historian Bill Jay suggests it was necessary to indicate that *qualified* help could be expected in straightening their garments or settling children.<sup>100</sup> However, come the latter half of the nineteenth century, male practitioners strove to align themselves with the 'brotherhood' of science, thereby encouraging what is described by Jennifer Tucker in *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* as a 'masculinization' of photography.<sup>101</sup> This 'fraternity' of the photographic profession could account for the under representation of women,

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<sup>97</sup> C. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turne of the Century America*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 4-6.

<sup>98</sup> Michelle Lalumière, "Early Photography: Commercial Portraiture," *Fields of Vision, Women in Photography*, Tom Beck, Michelle Lalumière and Cynthia Wayne. (Baltimore: Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery, 1995), 11.

<sup>99</sup> Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers*, 42.

<sup>100</sup> Bill Jay. *Infantry Tactics Coping with children in the 19th-century photographic studio*.

<http://web.archive.org/web/20070720004509/http://www.billjayonphotography.com/Infantry%20Tactics.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> Tucker, *Photography as Eyewitness*, 103.

underscoring even more the boldness of Stuart's open declaration as a professional. It might also explain why it would have been extraordinarily difficult for Mrs. H. F. Stuart to lay claim to a photographic innovation in the bereavement industry that borrowed from the camera's burgeoning reputation as scientific apparatus, able to observe that which the naked eye could not.

Mrs. H. F. Stuart, the owner of the studios at 258 Washington, will be proposed as "author" or "co-author" of the spirit photograph somewhat later in this text. This heretical suggestion will have taken note of the complex relationship that scholars have already indicated may have existed between that individual and W. H. Mumler. For example, in her thesis, Kristy Sharpe postulates that Stuart and Mumler went into business together.<sup>102</sup> Not only does Sharpe highlight Stuart's financial interest in the endeavor – documented through a letter to the *Herald of Progress* where she is accused of preventing Mumler's practice outside of her studios, feeling entitled to a share of all accruing proceeds – but Sharpe makes passing mention of the possibility that Stuart may have been an "accomplice in the creation of" the spirit photographs.<sup>103</sup>

Further implicating the two individuals in more than a merely spatial connection is an article in the April 1863 *Herald of Progress*, which suggested that an extra in Mumler's image could be identified as a living individual who had sat for a portrait by Stuart.<sup>104</sup> Prolific as she was, Stuart had many plates from which a spiritual extra could have been procured, especially since each carte-de-visite plate exposed the sitter in several different poses. Keen business woman that she

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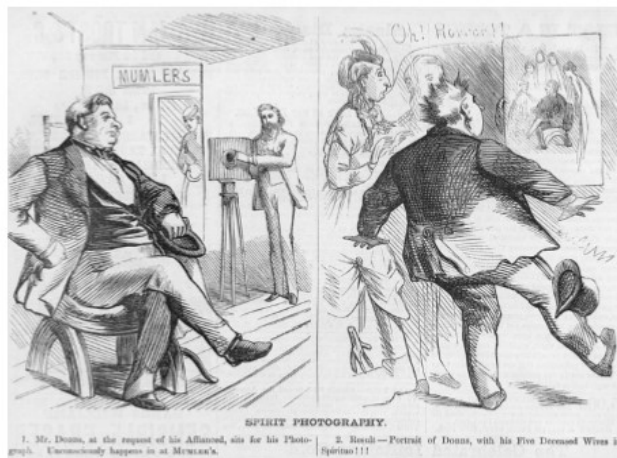
<sup>102</sup> Kristy Sharpe, "A Stupendous Fraud," 39.

<sup>103</sup> "This peremptory refusal to allow those 'spirit' pictures to be produced outside of Mrs. Stuart's chamber puts the shadow of suspicion upon this affair which no special pleading will ever be able to dissipate." *Herald of Progress*, (November 22, 1862). Sharpe bases this claim on the article by Charles M. Plumb "'Spirit Photographs.' A Word of Caution," *Herald of Progress*, New York (April 11, 1863).

<sup>104</sup> Though from the wording it is unclear whether the photograph was definitively shot *by* her or just in her studios. Of course, I have yet to find record of any photographer other than she and Mumler working from her studios. "We have, however, seen at least one spirit photograph by Mr. Mumler in which the alleged spirit form is unmistakably a copy of the picture of a living person, which picture was in the hands of Mrs. Stuart." Plumb "Spirit Photographs.' A Word of Caution," (April 11, 1863).



was, she would have likely kept a finely ordered repertoire of her plates in preparation for reprint orders. In other words, and here taking the cynical view that spirit photography was manipulated production, Mumler may have borrowed more than her furniture for props. Certainly, he was accused of repurposing these portraits on more than one occasion and in February of 1863, specifically that of a ‘still living’ woman.<sup>105</sup> As Stuart’s photography was produced solely in the eighteen sixties, I believe it safe to assume that most of the young women on her plates were still living at the time of Mumler’s purported borrowing, leaving his images wide-open to this type of recognition. Female spiritual extras were the preference of male sitters, a tendency that was observed somewhat mockingly in contemporary cartoons. (Fig.34).



**Figure 34** Unknown  
Spirit Photography Cartoons  
*Harper's Weekly*, May 8, 1869

In his memoirs, Mumler claims that negative press for his photographic work became too great and compelled him to relocate to New York. Clearly he exaggerates somewhat, as he had continued success upon his return to Boston and there is some evidence of his ongoing relationship with Spiritualist H. F. Gardner, despite his mild public criticism of Mumler in 1863

<sup>105</sup> H.F. Gardner, M.D. “The Spirit Photographs,” *Banner of Light*, February 28, 1863, 4.

and as we will see, with a spiritualist medium of the highest standing, Fanny Conant.<sup>106</sup> One thing is certain, however: despite her very public career, and the fact that she *ran* the studios where Mumler produced his first spirit photograph, Mrs. H. F. Stuart seemingly disappears from all records a couple of years before Mumler is on the road to New York City. Furthermore she is all but banished from his textual utterances. Whatever Stuart's role may have been in the development of an initially highly productive enterprise, the individual who must have learned from her does not credit her with any of his knowledge of photography nor any place in the development of the new business. Effectively, he turns his back on someone who was not without serious interest to at least one of the contemporaries who scrutinized his business: "as to the agency by which these copies are produced, we wish our opinions to be distinctly understood in this effect, that the only evil spirits – if any – concerned in the work, are those of Mrs. Stuart, Mr. Mumler, and their mortal assistants."<sup>107</sup>

Mumler does however give a great deal of credit to another woman – Hannah Green Turner – the woman whom he married in 1865. In his published memoirs, William devotes a generous few lines to Hannah's praise, attributing much of his success in spirit photography to her. Even he adds, "for my first development."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Seemingly reluctant, Gardner was compelled to acknowledge, in the Spiritualist press, evidence against Mumler. In a statement, Gardner says of Mumler: "...while I am fully in belief that genuine spirit likenesses have been produced through his mediumship, evidence of deception in two cases, at least, has been furnished me, which is perfectly conclusive...I am satisfied, beyond a doubt, that in the instances referred to, Mr. Mumler, or some person connected with Mrs. Stuart's rooms, have been guilty of deception in palming off, as genuine spirit likenesses, pictures of a person who is now living in this city." "The Spirit Photographs," *The Banner of Light* (February 28, 1863): 4. However, on September 4, 1869, Gardner even presided over the marriage of Hannah Mumler's sister, Eliza, to Edward L. Goodrich. See page 74.

<sup>107</sup> Charles M. Plumb, "'Spirit Photographs.' A Word of Caution," *Herald of Progress* (New York), April 11, 1863.

<sup>108</sup> Mumler, "The Personal Experiences, Part Five," *Banner of Light* (February 27, 1875): 3.



## Hannah Green and Spirit Bodies

As mentioned previously, William Mumler stated repeatedly in public forums and unequivocally in his 1869 statement to court, that he was alone in the Stuart photography studios at 258 Washington Street at the time of his first spirit photography. A jewelry engraver with no prior knowledge of photography, he claimed to have been working with what would have been relatively expensive equipment and chemicals that could have posed dangers had they not been handled properly, all the while relying solely on what he had surmised by watching the young man he had been in the habit of visiting.<sup>109</sup> To be understood as having been uneducated as a photographer and alone seems to have been extremely important to Mumler. Until his death he stood by his solitude on that occasion.

There are some problems with this claim, although given the fact that Mumler the engraver and Stuart the jewelry manufacturer were listed as working in the same building in 1861 makes a familiarity between the two professionals anything but unnatural to assume.<sup>110</sup> However, there is no other reference in Mumler's various accounts of the invention of spirit photography of a male friend, whose name was not given, providing any kind of informal knowledge about photographic procedures. Moreover, there was another woman said to have been very close at hand at the earliest stages of his work in spirit photography; Hannah Green who became in his wife in 1864. She was present, he wrote, for the first "development" of spirit photography:

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<sup>109</sup> The following is the beginning of William Mumler's statement to the court as printed in "The Triumph of the Ghosts: Mumler Discharged by Justice Dowling," *New York World*, May 4, 1869, 2. "In 1861, in the City of Boston, while engaged as an engraver, I was in the habit of visiting a young man who was employed in a photographic gallery kept by Mrs. Stewart, on Washington street. Occasionally I would experiment with the instruments and chemicals. One Sunday, while entirely alone in the gallery, I attempted to get a picture of myself, and then it was that I first discovered, while developing it, that a second form appeared on the plate." Other sources – such as the previously mentioned *New York Sun* article of February 26 1869 – allude to the fact that as an engraver, he had prior knowledge of chemicals and was engaged in offering Stuart some advice. (See page 25 for quote.)

<sup>110</sup> In the 1861 directory, W.H. Mumler is listed at 221 Washington as a silver engraver and Mrs.H.F. Stuart is listed at 221 Washington as a jewelrey manufacturer. In other words, they were at the very same address, pages 322 and 514.

“A great many instances of wonderful cures which have been effected through her medium powers, could be given; but as that is only indirectly connected with the subject in hand, I must forego that pleasure. I cannot refrain, however, from speaking of her wonderful *magnetic powers*, as I believe them to be directly connected with spirit-photography, and that to them I am largely indebted for my ability in taking the likeness of those who have passed on; also for my first development.”<sup>111</sup>

One can interpret the phrase “first development” in a number of ways, but it is certainly not remiss to suggest that Hannah Green, who most scholars agree had been a secretary at Mrs. H. F. Stuart’s studios *before* the incident of March 1861, could have been present that very afternoon. At the very least she was, he did admit, present days later when he returned to the studio to apologize for his prank and the unwanted press that ensued, he “opened the door [and] the lady behind the counter (who was not by then but later became my wife), exclaimed, ‘Here comes Mr. Mumler.’”<sup>112</sup> Never using his wife’s given name, in the section entitled *Mrs. W. H. Mumler*, he writes: “Mrs. M. is a perfect battery herself, and, on her placing hands upon the head of a patient, the subtle current is felt distinctly coursing through every tissue of the body. I have seen men faint, under the peculiar reaction caused in their systems by imparting this wonderful, life giving principle of *animal magnetism*.” He then went on to praise her for her magnetic abilities and attributes much of his on-going success to her.<sup>113</sup>

A variety of factors may have determined Mumler’s insistence on the solo nature of his discovery, both in terms of its untutored nature and its physical isolation. A casual reference to having watched the activities of a male friend might have served gender expectations of the time better than, as has been suggested earlier, the possibility that he was actually in the habit of visiting the photographic studios in order to seek formal instruction from Stuart. A refusal to address explicitly whether Hannah Green was with him on the afternoon of the discovery is

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<sup>111</sup> Mumler, “The Personal Experiences, Part Five,” *Banner of Light* (February 27, 1875): 3.

<sup>112</sup> Mumler, “The Personal Experiences, Part Five,” *Banner of Light* (February 27, 1875): 3.

<sup>113</sup> Mumler, “The Personal Experiences, Part One” *Banner of Light* (January 9, 1875): 1.

perhaps also linked to gender concerns, though of a different order: according to 1861 public records, Hannah was still married to Thomas Miller Turner, though divorce records would later indicate that he had deserted her and two children two years previously.<sup>114</sup>

On the other hand, the somewhat unlikely claim by William Mumler that he was totally alone that afternoon may have been prompted by a desire to protect those adjacent to him from the scrutiny that he may have predicted would follow the ‘new truth’ of spirit photographs. That scrutiny did come, fast and became harsher as the 1860s moved forward. In Boston, where as has been seen his invention was greeted with some genuine elation, some damning critiques were issued as early as 1863 by HF. Gardner and a ‘low profile’ for Mumler’s spirit photography can be discerned by 1867.<sup>115</sup> This resulted in him deciding, for the sake of his family – Hannah and her two sons – to move to New York, where reactions from civic official were overt and became aggressive. Following up on some suspicious press, the Mayor of New York, A. Oakley Hall, sent Marshal Joseph H. Tooker undercover to investigate.<sup>116</sup> Tooker posed for a spirit photograph under an assumed name, and when he did not recognize the gentleman extra who appeared next to him in the image, Mumler was indicted for fraud.<sup>117</sup>

William Mumler’s pre-trial, conducted in court, garnered a great deal of attention and local women petitioned to attend. In a formal letter to the presiding Judge Dowling, Mrs. Amelia Brookes wrote: “We desire, without interfering upon your duties, that suitable accommodation may be granted to us of the “weaker sex” who wish to be present at this, the first time that our

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<sup>114</sup> Their official divorce papers are dated May 23, 1864. At this time she claims desertion as of January 1<sup>st</sup> 1859.

<sup>115</sup> See footnote 106 for statement by H. F. Gardner. In 1867, William Mumler is no longer listed as a photographer, instead he has seemingly returned to his work as an engraver with his brother Andrew Craigie. They are listed under “engravers” simply as “Mumler Bros. r. 204 Washington. Hannah does not appear in the 1867 directory.

<sup>116</sup> Kaplan, *The Strange Case*, 16.

<sup>117</sup> Tooker was told that it was his father-in-law who appeared in the spirit photograph, he said it was not. Kaplan XVI, 182.

belief has been made the subject of judicial determination.”<sup>118</sup> Though derided, these women were allowed in, where they joined several women who appeared as witnesses for the defense.<sup>119</sup> Notably absent, however, from the trial were either of the two women who were known to have occupied the physical space in which assumed “trickery” had been initially invented. Nevertheless, Hannah Green Mumler figured largely in the related press and in the testimony of witnesses. According to these accounts, Hannah prepped clients for spiritual encounter and guided them towards a positive identification of the extra. On the stand James R. Gilmore – a wealthy business woman and novelist who published under the name Edmund Kirke – relayed details of his session: “Mrs. Mumler, who sat in front of me at the second sitting said to me while Mumler was closing the aperture, “Now you will have a picture, and a good one”; and he adds, that she went on to describe the individual whom she saw standing at his back, and who would go on the photograph.”<sup>120</sup> After the acquittal, Hannah was even said to have become possessed by the visiting spirit who wished to communicate with the clients.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Amelia V. Brookes, “The Spiritual Photograph Case – A Letter to Justice Dowling,” *The New York Times* (April 21, 1869): 10.

<sup>119</sup> While they were permitted to attend the proceedings, opinionated nineteenth century press proved fairly cruel in their depiction of Mumler’s Spiritualist supporters, the women in particular. One *New York Times* reporter described them as stubborn, foolish and mostly ugly. “Spiritual Photography,” *The New York Times* (April 24, 1869): 4. As Cloutier indicates, that the women were “matronly-looking” with “pale faces and lack-luster eyes” led this reporter to deduce that their interest in Spiritualism surely stemmed from their own nearness to death. Cloutier, “Mumler’s Ghosts,” 67. This appalling description sheds some light on popular attitudes about women and Spiritualism at the time. Among those to take the stand in Mumler’s defense were; Mrs. Luthera C. Reeves, Mrs. Ann F. Ingalls. Kaplan, *The Strange Case*, 151-152. The preceding information comes from Elbridge T. Gerry’s 1869 argument to the court which was republished in 2008 within the pages of Kaplan’s book. Gerry, Elbridge Thomas. *Arguments of Mr. Elbridge T. Gerry, of Counsel for the People, Before Justic Dowling, on the Preliminary Examination of Wm. H. Mumler, Charged with Obtaining Money by Pretended “Spirit” Photographs*; reported by Andrew Devine. (New York: Baker Voorhis, 1869).

<sup>120</sup> Mr. Elridge T. Gerry, Of Counsel for the People, exclaimed “This shows that *she* knew how the trick was done. Mumler trusted *her*, if he did not trust anyone else.” Kaplan, *The Strange Case*, 176-178. Gerry, *Arguments of Mr. Elbridge T. Gerry*. Edmund Kirke is likely best known for his book: *Among the Pines, or South in Session Time*, New York: J. R. Gilmore, 1862.

<sup>121</sup> Mentions of her becoming entranced appear in Mumler’s memoirs and contemporary articles but I have not encountered definitive evidence of this occurring until after the trial. Mumler, “The Personal Experiences: Parts Three, Four, Five and Six,” *The Banner of Light* (January 30):1 & (February 13, 27 & March 27, 1875):3. For an excellent description of Mrs. Mumler’s ability to see the spirits before the plates are exposed: “A Wonderful

In his memoirs, William held to the claim that Hannah Green Mumler was engaged solely as a secretary at the time of his invention, and at the trial he makes no mention of her involvement.<sup>122</sup> This does lead one to suspect a desire to protect an individual who presumably had become dear to him. That being said, his assertion that he had been uneducated and alone certainly served, and may have been prompted by, a desire to make more compelling the story of his discovery while also protecting himself. To be but a “humble instrument in the hands of the invisible host that surrounds us” imbued his practice with the necessary magic, and also relinquished him of any serious responsibility with regards to explaining the phenomenon.<sup>123</sup> That, of course, would prove handy in court, but it also helped him position his practice firmly within the domain of Spiritualism, with Hannah’s profile being of importance to the narratives that associated him with that important movement within New England society.



**Figure 35** William H. Mumler  
*Fanny Conant with Vashti, Spirit-Girl*, 1870-1875  
 J. Paul Getty Museum

Note: The Getty gives this the title of Ella Bonner but Kaplan Identifies it as Conant. Indeed, it bears a striking resemblance to the other cdvs of Conant, not those of Bonner.

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Mystery: Ghosts Sitting for their Portraits,” *The New York Sun* (February 26 1869), 2. Republished in *Human Nature : A Monthly Journal of Zoistic Science* (June 1869): 306.

<sup>122</sup> Mumler, “The Personal Experiences: Part Five,” *The Banner of Light* (February 27, 1875):3. Kaplan, *The Strange Case*, 204-205.

<sup>123</sup> Mumler, “The Personal Experiences: Part One,” *The Banner of Light* (January 9, 1875):1. Though, in his memoirs, he shares a very interesting theory that involves light transference. Mumler, “The Personal Experiences: Part Six,” *The Banner of Light* (March 27, 1875):3.

The story of Hannah Green Mumler's emergence as a medium-associate of W.H. Mumler is of great interest to this thesis, and like so much else in it, is cloudy. Within less than a year of Mumler's invention or discovery, his spirit images had become profoundly implicated in the Spiritualist movement, even though early newspaper reports indicated that initially he had little use for its tenets. Some of the leading members of the New England Spiritualist community had made their way to the Stuart studios soon after hearing of the new phenomenon. In addition to a very important local Spiritualist leader Dr. H. F. Gardner, who has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, Mumler's work was tested and celebrated by the likes of Luther Colby, a former *Boston Post* printer who in 1857 had become publisher/editor of the leading Massachusetts' Spiritualist newspaper, *The Banner of Light*, and was regarded as a highly effective medium, "Cared for by the Invisible Workers in the Higher Life."<sup>124</sup> From Rhode Island came Thomas Robinson Hazard – the older brother of Joseph Hazard. (Fig.16) – and from Philadelphia came the much respected Quaker physician and abolitionist, Dr. Henry T. Child, who was a cautious critic of many of the accoutrements, but not principles of Spiritualism, and was also responsible for sending in February 1863, a generally positive report on Mumler's work to *The Spiritual Magazine* published in England.<sup>125</sup>

Hannah Green Mumler and her purported talents as a medium were more than fortuitous resources for the new field being developed "by" William Mumler. Largely, though not exclusively the preserve of women, the medium – in the early years sometimes called

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<sup>124</sup> Colby and Rich also published Mumler's memoirs in 1875. In these memoirs, Mumler says of taking Colby's spirit image: "This, I think, was the first time I took a likeness of an Indian." Unbeknownst to Mumler, the evening prior, Colby had visited the medium Mrs. Ozias Gillett, whose Indian Spirit-Guide had said to him: "Go have picture taken; me go with you." The following day, Mrs. Fanny Conant positively recognized the Chief Wapanaw and the spirit photograph was positively confirmed. Mumler, "The Personal Experiences: Part One," *The Banner of Light* (January 9, 1875):1. For an account of Colby's mediumship: John Day, *A Biographical Memorial of Luther Colby*, (1895), 29.

<sup>125</sup> Child attests to having seen more than a hundred examples of Mumler's work. "A Letter from D. F. T. Child," *Spiritual Magazine*, Volume 4 (1863): 183.

“clairvoyant” – was an extraordinarily important part of the developing popularity of Spiritualism, and the appearance of a female guide for the “dead” by his side would have helped secure and sustain a serious clientele for ‘the accidental photographer.’<sup>126</sup> It would have also naturalized his innovative practice within the immediate neighborhood of the Stuart studios at 258 Washington Street. The area was thick with clairvoyants/mediums. Close by at 158 were the offices of the *Banner of Light*, where three nights a week during the 1860s, the renowned Mrs. Fanny Conant conducted spirit circles.<sup>127</sup> She would, before her death in 1870, spend a significant amount of time in the Mumler orbit, sitting for at least four known spirit photographs. (Fig.35).<sup>128</sup> But Washington Street also was home to other important clairvoyants and mediums. Adeline Latham was one such professional, located through the first half of the 1860s at 292 Washington, and functioning as a clairvoyant and clairvoyant physician, and at a somewhat greater distance, in the 600 block, was Miss Mary C. Gay, who throughout the 1860s advertised herself as a clairvoyant and eclectic physician.<sup>129</sup>

It is by no means certain when Hannah Green first began to operate formally on the mediumistic powers both her husband and numerous scholars have said had been with her since childhood.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Sometimes called a medium himself in the very early years. “Mr. Wm. H. Mumler is the medium and the artist who makes photographs of spirits.” A. B. Child, “Spirit Photographs,” *Banner of Light* (November 8, 1862): 4.

<sup>127</sup> “The Séances at which the communications under this heading are given are held at the *Banner of Light* Office, No. 158 Washington Street, Room No. 5 (upstairs) every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday afternoon, and are free to the public... Each Message in this Department of the *Banner* we claim was spoken by the spirit whose name it bears, Through Mrs. J. H. Conant, while in a condition called the Trance.” “Messages Department,” *Banner of Light*, (December 27, 1862): 6.

<sup>128</sup> The other two known spirit photographs of Fanny Conant are “Fanny Conant with the Spirit of Her Brother Charles H. Crowell,” & “Fanny Conant,” both 1870-75, residing at The J. Paul Getty Museum and “Fanny Conant with the Spirit of an Unidentified Child,” 1862-75, at the College of Psychic Studies, London. Figure 35 shows Fanny Conant in the company of “Vashti” the spirit-girl who began controlling Conant as of 1870. Mumler recounts the legend of Vashti’s birth in his memoirs, an “Indian girl” who was born with the features of a white child. Mumler, “The Personal Experiences: Part Five,” *The Banner of Light* (February 27, 1875): 3.

<sup>129</sup> “Latham A. C. Mrs. Clairvoyant physician, 292 Wash” and “Gay M. C. Miss, clairvoyant physician, b.624 Wash.” *Boston City Directory* for year beginning July 1, 1864, 214 and 146.

<sup>130</sup> I have found no official record of her abilities since childhood, nor have I found evidence to support the claim made by some that her mother also worked as a medium. Kaplan, 107; Tucker, 75. Cloutier says this was passed on

She is not mentioned as a clairvoyant/medium in early newspaper accounts of what was transpiring in the Stuart premises. Indeed it is not until about 1865 that – now as Hannah Green Mumler – she advertised herself as a clairvoyant, later presenting herself as a “mesmeric physician’ who could heal a variety of physical and psychic ailments. (Figs.36 and 37).<sup>131</sup> Her ability to be a “perfect battery”, as her husband described it, would be with her until her death in 1912, if advertisements are to be believed.

No matter when she first came to develop and practice mediumistic and related abilities, Hannah and her by-then husband demonstrated their sensitivity to the precarious role of the medium in relation to normative understandings of gender of the epoch. However, the same qualities that were perceived to make women better suited to the role of medium also made it difficult for them to retain positions of power. As Alex Owen notes in *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*, a woman’s spiritual authority was founded on a perceived passivity that facilitated possession and yet, was at odds with the assertive public voice they gained as medium. Thus, Owen suggests that the most powerful mediums were those who were essentially the most power/less.<sup>132</sup> The frequent adoption of ‘male controlling spirits’ addressed this incompatibility by making sense of their temporary, unusual access to authority and uncharacteristic aptitude for public speaking, a tactic that implied mediums were mere vehicles for the voice of great deceased men.<sup>133</sup> In *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies*, Jill Galvan describes this Victorian

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to her granddaughter but this is not so as she was unknowingly interviewing a man who was not a direct descendant of Hannah’s. Instead, he was descendant of Andrew Craigie Mumler, William’s brother.

<sup>131</sup> “Wonderful Cures,” *Cambridge Chronicle*, Vol. 48, n 46 (Nov 18, 1893): 12. “Mrs. Dr. H. F. Mumler, Mesmeric Physician,” *Cambridge Chronicle*, 12. “Spiritualism adopted from mesmerism the notion that entranced individuals could heal disease. But while mesmerism attributed the healing agency enabled by trance to a universal mesmeric fluid, Spiritualists transformed the healing trance into a form of mediumship.” Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 146.

<sup>132</sup> Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in late nineteenth Century England*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 233.

<sup>133</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 85.



phenomenon – and the tendency for women to prevail as receptionists, switchboard operators and typists – as that of the “woman-turned-communication-device”.<sup>134</sup> That Mrs. Mumler invoked a male control spirit, an American physician named Dr. Rush, indicates that she was aware of this dynamic.

A supposed medium since childhood, Mrs. W. H. Mumler – Hannah – is listed as ‘other’ or ‘mesmeric’ physician as early as 1872.<sup>135</sup> The address given for her business is 170 West Springfield, the same that William Mumler advertises, he listed under ‘photographist’. This same address is the only one that appears on any of William’s backstamped images.<sup>136</sup> As Hannah F. Mumler’s mother, Hannah D. Green, is listed at a different address in 1869 when William and Hannah F. were in New York, it seems likely that they relocated to this address together, perhaps for help with her two minor children.<sup>137</sup> In 1870, Hannah D. Green and William Mumler are listed as residing at the West Springfield address, he also as photographer, but Hannah F. is nowhere to be found.<sup>138</sup>

Reportedly aided by Mrs. Mumler, it is from this West Springfield address that William Mumler produced some of his most important work, being visited by the likes of Mrs. Mary Todd Lincoln

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<sup>134</sup> They however could not be trusted with the important messages. Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium*, 1.

<sup>135</sup> She is listed at 170 West Springfield in *The Boston Massachusetts Register*, 1872. P. 210. William is listed at this address under ‘photographists’.

<sup>136</sup> Some have speculated that Hannah F. Mumler’s mother, Hannah D. Green, was also a medium. In her thesis, Cloutier shares that she had a 1997 telephone interview with William’s great grandson who told her his mother was a spiritualist medium who, similar to Mrs. W. H. Mumler, claimed to have learned the art from her mother. I have traced this Edward Mumler and discovered he is the great-grandson of Andrew Craigie Mumler, grandson of William Bartlett Thompson Mumler. He is of no relation to Hannah Green or William H. Mumler.

<sup>137</sup> Spiritualist, Albert Morton, must have exaggerated when he implied that “very reduced circumstances” compelled Mumler to work from his mother-in-law’s parlour upon their return to Boston. Albert Morton. “Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler,” *The Carrier Dove* (February 1886): 275. In 1869, Hannah D. Green lived at 1593 Washington. *Boston City Directory for 1869*, 275.

<sup>138</sup> *Boston City Directory* (1870), 300 and 487. Hannah D. Green lived 1811-1901 and her daughter Hannah F. Green lived from 1832-1912.

and Henry Wilson, then Vice-President of the United States.<sup>139</sup> At this address, the Mumlers also became known for their by-weekly scéances during which several miraculous feats were realized by both “mediums”. At those open to the public, attendees inscribed concealed names on ballots and a blindfolded and entranced William would proceed to “make exquisite pencil drawings” on each.<sup>140</sup> Advertisements for *Correspondence* spirit photographs also ask that grieving clients think upon those they wish to see at precisely the same time that these sessions were occurring, implying that they were procured at this time.<sup>141</sup>

While residing at the West Springfield address, Hannah also began to openly advertise her services as magnetic healer. When engaged in these healing sessions, if asked who provided the diagnosis, a seemingly possessed Hannah always replied “Dr. Benjamin Rush.”<sup>142</sup> She attributed her healing abilities to this popular physician, who had lived from 1745-1813 and was widely known for his inquiries into diseases of the mind.<sup>143</sup> In his memoirs, William describes the arduous task of capturing Hannah’s image with her controlling spirit appearing as spiritual extra.<sup>144</sup> After many failed attempts he finally submitted fully to Rush’s will, awaiting indication that the time had arrived.<sup>145</sup> Proud of the results, the Mumlers displayed this image in their parlor studio where it was positively identified by a visiting client. Reportedly there on unrelated

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<sup>139</sup> Mumler offers a detailed accounts of both Mary Todd Lincoln and Henry Wilson’s visits. Mumler, “The Personal Experiences, Part Three and Six,” *Banner of Light* (January 30, 1875): 1 & (March 13, 1875): 3

<sup>140</sup> Morton. “Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler,” 33.

<sup>141</sup> See page 35, footnote 77.

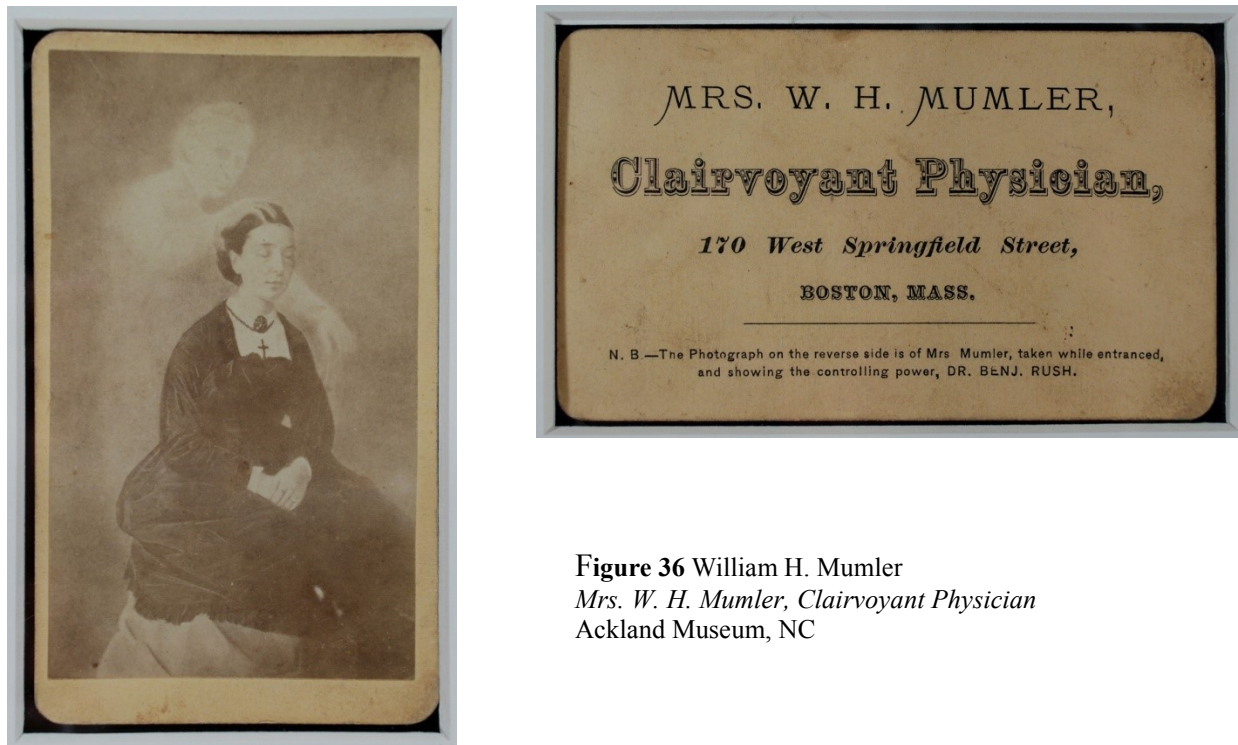
<sup>142</sup> Kaplan, *The Strange Case*, 108.

<sup>143</sup> He published one of the first psychiatric textbooks in the United States. Benjamin Rush, M.D. *Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon The Diseases of the Mind*. Philadelphia: Grigg and Elliot, 1812.

<sup>144</sup> Mumler writes about the ten years spent trying to produce a photograph of Hannah with Rush. “After I commenced to take spirit-pictures I made many sittings of my wife, with a desire of getting a picture of her control, but without success, there instead appearing friends, relatives and sometimes strangers. I often inquired of the Doctor, when she was under control, why he did not show himself? The general reply was, “Don’t be in a hurry, young man; you shall have my picture in good time.” Four years later, his entranced wife announced, “Young man, if you will prepare a plate, I think you may succeed in getting my picture.” Mumler, “The Personal Experiences: Part Five,” *The Banner of Light* (February 27, 1875): 3.

<sup>145</sup> Cox, *Body and Soul*, 116.

business, the woman recognized the doctor she had so cared for in life. (Fig.36).<sup>146</sup>



**Figure 36** William H. Mumler  
*Mrs. W. H. Mumler, Clairvoyant Physician*  
Ackland Museum, NC

In this image, no chair is employed and Hannah appears instead atop a perch swathed in heavy fabric. She wears a heavy black velvet dress and the whole skirt is arranged about her in a disheveled manner. A high necked white blouse contrasts this somber attire, emphasizing a cameo-like brooch under her chin and the prominently displayed crucifix that hangs below. Her eyes are closed as the spirit of Rush rests his hand on her head, his left hand shooting visible rays of energy down to her hands that rest on her lap. There is a cartoon-like quality to Benjamin Rush who overlaps Hannah with a far greater opacity than is observed in other spirit photographs by Mumler. More than in any other of Mumler's spirit photographs, here the spirit appears to envelop the sitter; standing behind her, he caresses the top of her head, his left arm reaching around her shoulder, the rays shooting over the front of her body.

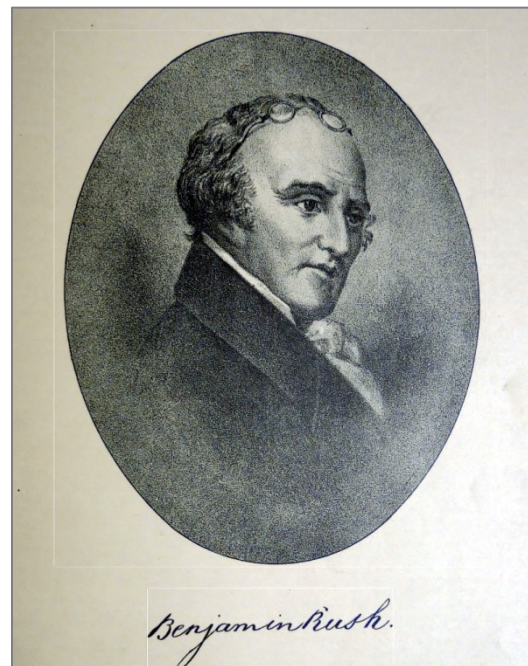
<sup>146</sup> Mumler, "The Personal Experiences, Part Five," *Banner of Light* (February 27, 1875): 3.

This ultimate promotional piece for the Mumler's jointly offered services is also the only known surviving photograph of Hannah Mumler aside from the etchings of lost spirit photographs that appeared on the cover of *Harper's Weekly*, May 8, 1869.<sup>147</sup> The pose employed for this image is calculated and iconic, harkening back to older modes of representing the occurrence of miracles. Rush's hand placed upon her head and the visible rays look exactly as they were expected to, drawing on historical depictions of divine intervention. Trying to make sense of extraordinary abilities, artists have long been displayed as though touched by an unknown presence that possesses and inspires them. Here this same tactic is seemingly employed to explain Hannah's ability as a magnetic healer and receptor of mysterious guidance. In a sense, all spirit photographs were a fresh take on miraculous imagery of the type discussed at length by Alfred Gell in *The Technology of Enchantment and The Enchantment of Technology*.<sup>148</sup> Manufactured by humans – William Mumler – the spirit photographs were not thought to have 'originated' in that way, instead – like other miraculous objects – they were thought to have mysteriously made themselves through some divine intervention. Just as many religious paintings were thought to have been created *through* the artist, William Mumler proclaimed himself a servant to the spirits, unable to explain the phenomenon with any certainty. The image of Hannah with Dr. Rush employs the iconography of both miraculous imagery and divine possession, the resulting image imbued with awe-inspiring magic and wonder. The Mumlers are at once artist and emissary.

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<sup>147</sup> There is also the cartoonish drawing included in the 1884 advertisement. (Figure 39, page 68).

<sup>148</sup> Alfred Gell. "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology." In *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, eds. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 23.



**Figure 37** Albert Morton  
*Mrs. W. H. Mumler and Spirit of Dr. Rush*  
*and Benjamin Rush*  
*The Carrier Dove* (Feb 1886), 35 and 43.

Dr. Albert Morton, a Maine-born medium who became prominent in Spiritualist circles in San Francisco, presented himself as an expert on Dr. Benjamin Rush, providing two articles and a personally drawn sketch of that physician in the February 1886 edition of *The Carrier Dove*.<sup>149</sup> Morton felt that this sketch, drawn from a wood-cut, demonstrated a striking resemblance to the extra – said to be Rush – which appears alongside the woman who would become “Mumler’s widow” in the spirit photograph taken in the eighteen-seventies. (Fig.37).<sup>150</sup> The work of the popular physician had not concluded with his passing on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1813.<sup>151</sup> As a matter of fact, many mediums claimed to be controlled by Dr. Rush, his spirit claimed to be “working” even

<sup>149</sup> Morton. “Dr. Benjamin Rush” and “Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler,” *The Carrier Dove* (Oakland), February 1886: 32-33 & 43.

<sup>150</sup> Morton. “Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler,” 33. The images in question appear on pages 35 and 43. Incidentally, *The Carrier Dove*’s copy of this spirit photograph – likely drawn by Morton – seems to have been enhanced to promote this recognition, images.

<sup>151</sup> Morton. “Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler,” 33.

across the Atlantic.<sup>152</sup> Morton likened Rush's ability as 'a spirit director' to attend to so many patients simultaneously to a train dispatcher's capacity to monitor and direct the movements of various locomotives.<sup>153</sup> Post May 1869, Morton escorted his daughter on the many occasions she was employed as pianist to the Mumlers' scéances, Morton often observed Hannah Mumler under Rush's influence. According to Morton, these sessions took place at William Mumler's mother-in-law's house as they had returned to Boston far too financially strapped by the pre-trial to furnish a gallery.<sup>154</sup> Morton references Mumler's production of what I have dubbed *Correspondence* spirit photographs, an activity Morton felt was regrettably underreported. At these "circles" in the early 1870s, the Mumlers also provided attendees with emblematic pictures drawn by an entranced and blindfolded William Mumler, his wife assisting. Produced in such a manner as to "preclude all possibility of fraud", audience members inscribed and then concealed the names of loved ones on pieces of paper, then watched as William produced several fine pencil drawings above each. A seldom mentioned aspect of the Mumler's activities, these services demonstrate a clear willingness to expand within the bereavement industry. Highlighting Hannah's flair for the dramatic and William's talent as a draughtsman, Morton's peak into these evenings also describes the activities of two adaptive individuals, very intent on surviving.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Morton. "Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler," 33. "Thus American medium Cora Tappan, speaking under the spirit guidance of Dr. Benjamin Rush before a British Spiritualist audience in 1875..." Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 152.

<sup>153</sup> Morton. "Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler," 32.

<sup>154</sup> Though, they did still have Stuart's table. "On my return from Cuba, in May, 1869, I found him at the residence of the mother-in-law in Boston, in very reduced circumstances. Unable to furnish a gallery, he was gaining a meagre support from taking spirit photographs, using the pictures of patrons to attract desired spirits, and in giving circles for the production of emblematic drawings. I do not remember seeing any statement in the Spiritual press in relation to this beautiful phase of his mediumship. Having proffered the services of my daughter as pianist at his circles, it was my privilege, as her escort, to attend many of them. The production of the pictures was in such a manner as to preclude all possibility of fraud." Morton. "Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler," 43.

<sup>155</sup> In closing, Morton advises readers to preserve any prints they may have of William's spirit photographs as he had confided that his negatives had been destroyed. He also mentions that in his final years, William had resorted to a



**WONDERFUL CURES.**

**A Doctor Whose Success has been Almost  
Miraculous Tells the Secret of her  
Power.**

It is an emphatic statement for any man or woman to make, professional or otherwise, that he or she will engage to cure any disease, or to say at once that it is incurable; but this claim is made by Dr H. F. Mumler, of 20 Chester square, who courts the fullest investigation and the truth of whose statements is confirmed by affidavits innumerable.

Mrs Mumler claims to possess the power—vitalized magnetism—in a degree but once before equalled, and that in the case of a physician dead a score of years, but known to old Bostonians. She does not claim supernatural power—that is, disclaims all connection with so-called mediums—but is possessed of a power giving her intuitive knowledge as to the cause, kind of and remedy for disease, and has had thirty years of practice, but never had to sign a death certificate.

In her luxurious parlour, surrounded by pictures, autographs and what-not of some of the land's most distinguished people, actors, clergymen, the wife of the greatest president the United States has ever seen, all of whom she has sent away well; and she is often consulted by some of Boston's highest physicians, whom the ethics of the profession compel to keep the matter secret. Men who are groping in the dark, and really experimenting with their patients, come to her for light.


Dr Mumler does not, although she is a studied physician in the use of drugs, etc., claim that this power is other than born in her, as artists or musicians are born. She is a cultured lady of fine personal appearance, tremendous and unweariable vitality, and in conversation one is impressed as her pure, direct English pours forth, with her self-confidence, born of continued success.

There is no disease but she will essay to cure it, or say at once, "I can relieve you and make you easy, but you are incurable." She does not profess to be able to create, and in case of consumption cannot restore a lung, but can clear out the most clotted one. In cancer she can always relieve and often cure, and will tell at once which she can do. Children almost in the throes of death with scarlet fever and other dreadful diseases have been brought back to life, and the many well authenticated cases in Boston and its suburbs, where she has a large practice, are legion.

Dr Mumler will also take patients at her beautiful home, cared for by her sister, where every luxury is provided. Confidence is bred in the patient from her first touch, making recovery much easier than where there is doubt and despondency. There are many today invalid and dying who may easily be saved by consultation and care from this remarkable woman who claims—and makes her claim good—to possess an inborn power that the greatest minds acknowledge exists. There are inspired poets, musicians, painters, those whose hands and brains are guided by the Supreme. Can anyone say why there should not be inspired physicians?

Right: **Figure 38** Unknown  
Advertisement for Mrs. Dr. H. F. Mumler,  
Mesmeric Physician  
*Cambridge Chronicle*, February 10, 1894.

**Animal Magnetism**  
AS A CURATIVE AGENT.



**Mrs. Dr. H. F. Mumler,**  
**Mesmeric Physician,**  
20 Chester Sq., Boston.

Within the past thirty years most startling discoveries have been made in what is termed VITALIZED MAGNETISM, as applied to the power of divining or detecting any disease in the human system. Not only is the disease determined and located, but the power to prescribe the proper remedy has been given to but a few, who have thus been enabled to perform cures that might be considered miraculous. To Mrs. Dr. H. F. Mumler this wonderful gift has been given. She has been endowed with a VITAL MAGNETISM so wonderful that her will (seemingly) has expelled diseases that the most skilful physicians of this country have pronounced incurable.

**The Boston Globe Says:**

"One of the most powerful imparters of the Life Principle (animal magnetism) is Mrs. Dr. H. F. Mumler, of this city. By simply placing her hands upon the head of the patient, the Vital Element is felt coursing through every nerve and tissue of the body, displacing disease and imparting renewed health and vigor to the invalid. When Dr. Mumler is mesmerized, she sees the whole internal working of the system, detecting the disease at once and prescribing its remedy. The doctor would emphatically state that she has nothing whatever to do with Medical Electrical Magnetism as produced by chemical batteries. This must not be confounded with her treatment of Animal Magnetism, for, while one is artificial, the other is natural. Mrs. Dr. Mumler has met with unparalleled success in treating every form of disease, both chronic and acute, which statement is supported by the testimony and affidavits of many of our best and well-known citizens, both in public and private life."

**MRS. DR. MUMLER**  
May be consulted daily.  
Office Hours, from 8 A. M. to 12 Noon.  
All correspondence answered promptly.  
Send for pamphlet. Office and residence,  
**20 Chester Sq.,  
BOSTON.**

Left: **Figure 39** Unknown  
Advertisement for Dr. H. F. Mumler, *Wonderful Cures*  
*Cambridge Chronicle*, November 18, 1893

career in photo-engraving as mediumship was not sufficiently profitable. Morton. "Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler," 275.

Hannah Green Mumler's capacity for survival as a professional with extraordinary skills at self-promotion are verifiable long after she had separated from her husband in the late 1870s and after his death in 1884.<sup>156</sup> In the November 18, 1893 *Cambridge Chronicle* for example, there exists an 'article' on a page of advertisements that highlights her abilities as a "doctor whose success has been almost miraculous" and whose healing sessions, now declared as not to be in any way associated with mediumistic assistance, were conducted in "luxurious parlors" which contained "pictures, autographs and what-not of some of the land's most distinguished people...all of whom she has sent away well."<sup>157</sup> A few months later, and using a striking visual image of herself, the 60 -some year-old advertised her services in the same newspaper as Mrs. Dr. H.F. Mumler, Mesmeric Physician, pulling in positive citations from the *Boston Globe* to enhance her credibility. (Fig.39).<sup>158</sup>

Just as the woman referred to as Mrs. Stuart was shown earlier in this thesis to have been be a professional with a public profile, skilled in two areas of creative production, a closer look at Hannah Green Mumler here reveals a woman of some very real strengths, someone who emerges in 1865 as a professional was able to continue her various kinds of work through the 'scandal' of the New York City proceedings, through the death of her husband, and into a profession as alternative physician, functioning beyond Spiritualist circles. Turning back to the 26 February 1869 issue of the *New York Sun* that was so helpful in bringing together hair jewellery and photography together in the career of the woman described in the early 1860s and in Mumler scholarship as Mrs. Stuart, one finds that 'Mrs. Mumler' is given a vital role. Indeed, she is "the

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<sup>156</sup> William and Hannah were never officially divorced but they ceased living together as of at least 1880. *1880 United States Federal Census, Inhabitants in Boston in the County of Suffolk, State Massachusetts, enumerated June 8, 1880*, 25.

<sup>157</sup> "Wonderful Cures," *Cambridge Chronicle*, 12.

<sup>158</sup> "Mrs. Dr. H. F. Mumler, Mesmeric Physician," *Cambridge Chronicle*, 12.



lady by whom Mr. Mumler was led into the business,” the very “young lady who, as a medium “who kept a shop for the sale of jewellery “and developed skills in photography to satisfy the desire for particular forms of memory objects. Effectively, Mrs. Mumler, who was present for the newspaper reporter’s interview in 1869 and actually contributed to it, is portrayed as an individual into whom are collapsed the considerable abilities of both Mrs. H. F. Stuart and Mrs. H. F. Mumler.<sup>159</sup> Simply put, if this article is taken seriously, it would appear that the two careers this text has been investigating separately actually belong to one woman, a woman who possessed a remarkably wide, successful range of accomplishments.

This much-neglected article, which came to my attention recently, might initially seem to be an oddity, a simple case of sloppy reporting or deliberate subterfuge by reporter and interviewees.<sup>160</sup> Or it may be very pertinent to addressing a certain opacity in the precise circumstances of the leading protagonists during the period of the discovery/invention of spirit photography that have been noted, in passing, in some earlier writing on the subject. In either case, attempts must be made to clarify what transpired at 258 Washington Street in the early 1860s, and public records, of a firmer nature than city directories and newspaper reports, may prove useful.

## **Public Records**

William Howard Mumler was born in Boston in 1832, the third child of John George Julius Mumler and Susan B. Bowers. William’s eldest brother (1826-1908) shared John Sr.’s full name, the second eldest was named Andrew Craigie Mumler (1830-1867) and sisters Mary F. Mumler

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<sup>159</sup> “A Wonderful Mystery: Ghosts Sitting for their Portraits,” *The New York Sun* (February 26 1869): 2.

<sup>160</sup> Thank you to Catherine Mackenzie for bringing this article to my attention. Unlike many other pertinent articles, this one was not reprinted in Kaplan’s text. He does make mention of it on a few pages but he never addresses the manner in which the author speaks of Mrs. Mumler. I have not encountered this article discussed by any other specialists in spirit photography.

(1836-?) and Ellen Malinda Mumler (1840-1875) followed William.<sup>161</sup> John Jr. ran a confectionary in New York and was married to Lizzie Warren Walsh in 1884, their son John George Julius Mumler III was born the following year.<sup>162</sup> Andrew Craigie – also an engraver with whom William was in business at points in his life – married Hannah Abigail Bartlett in 1853 and they had three children; William Bartlett Thompson Mumler (1856-1936), Susan B. (1858-1878) and Alice (1860-?). In 1870, three years after his Hannah's death, Andrew remarried a Mary Nason and Elizabeth Evelyn was born two years later. William Howard's sister Mary married Adolphus H. Bates in 1856. Ellen Malinda married James Wellington Jacobs in 1860 and died at thirty-five years of age.

This brief family sketch is provided in order to demonstrate the potential for confusion in a large family with oft repeated names which, incidentally, continue further down the line with another Andrew and William Mumler being born every twenty or so years. William Howard Mumler's tree is far simpler than that of, say, his brother Andrew Craigie Mumler. He was born in 1832, he married Hannah Frances Green in 1864 and, according to public records, he never had any children of his own. He did for a time help raise Hannah's two children from her first marriage, but after they separated – seemingly around 1879 – he did not remarry, dying five years later.<sup>163</sup>

Although newspaper reports and advertisements may not hold the same degree of perceived authority as government or legal documents, it is worth noting that they lead to the conclusion that Mumler was a fairly successful copywriter and inventor after his spirit photography practice

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<sup>161</sup> William's parents were both born in Nova Scotia, Canada. "John George Julius Mumler," Find A Grave, accessed March 1, 2014. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=102317237&ref=acom>

<sup>162</sup> One source had her as Walsh the other as Welsh. *Marriages Registered in the City of Boston for the Year 1884*, entry no. 3054.

<sup>163</sup> I have deduced that William and Hannah Mumler must have separated in 1879 as they are listed at the same address in the Boston Directory of 1878 and then at separate addresses in 1880. Also worth noting, in 1880 she has dropped his initials, reverting to Mrs. H. F. Mumler.

had declined. Responsible for innovations in printing techniques, he produced The Mumler Photo-Electrotype, a process that helped produce clearer reproductions from photographs without the need for woodcuts.<sup>164</sup> Perhaps this aspect of his biography – his apparent mastery of darkroom manipulation – is downplayed in his memoirs and in many accounts as it threatens the magic of his images. A few examples of his copywork reside at the Boston Athenæum and demonstrate his exploration of the medium.<sup>165</sup> As interesting as the final unfolding of William H. Mumler's career may be, it is not directly pertinent to a clarification of what happened in 1861, a point in time, he argues and others accept, when he discovered spirit photography. Returning to government records to see what they have might have to offer, one is confronted with what appears to be absence of William H. Mumler in the federal census of 1860. He is not recorded in Massachusetts nor in any other state under his name, or common faulty transcriptions of his name. Further research may turn up something, but at present this absence is somewhat intriguing given that the two women who are part of the old narrative and are about to enter a new one also appear to be missing from the 1860 government accounting of its citizens.

The biography of Hannah F. Green is brought into sharper relief by public records. Born in 1832 to Thomas Green and Hannah D. Goodwin in Marblehead, Massachusetts, she was the eldest of

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<sup>164</sup> The 1878 Boston Directory has him listed as owner of this company at 170 West Springfield. Mrs. W. H. Mumler – mesmeric physician – is listed just below him at the same address. His obituary also speaks of his invention. It begins with the announcement: “Mr. William H. Mumler, a well-known inventor and treasurer of the Photo-Electrotype Company, died at his residence in Boston on the 16<sup>th</sup> ult.” J. Trail Taylor, ed., *The Photographic Times and American Photographer*, Volume 14 (New York: Scovill Manufacturing Company, Publishers, 1884), 304.

<sup>165</sup> A group portrait shows the diffused qualities of an image produced using the copy-neg process, wherein an image is separated from its backing and sometimes waxed before being contact printed. Another cdv bears on its back the title “President Lincoln and Tad, photographed by Mumler, 258 Washington Street, Boston” though they do not appear in the correlating image. This suggests that he had spent some time producing copies of the very two individuals who appeared in his celebrated cdv of Mary Todd Lincoln in 1872. Samples of Mumler's photomontage work also remains. There is an undeniable correlation between his former occupations and his later expertise in printwork, a clear culmination of his specialties.

three girls in a family that appears to have fragmented sometime around 1850.<sup>166</sup> In that year, she and her sister Caroline lived at home with their parents, but the youngest sister lived with her maternal grandparents. By 1855, the Massachusetts state census indicates that the parents were living apart, with Thomas Green living with his daughter Hannah, part of a household made up of the man – Thomas Miller Turner – she had married in 1852, and their sons Henry N. (born in 1852) and Edwin F. (born in 1854).<sup>167</sup> The Greens never again lived together, and the reference in the state census is the sole public document which records the Turners as living together. Indeed, they and their children disappear from all accessible public records until 1864 when Hannah requests a divorce on the grounds of desertion.<sup>168</sup> In other words, Hannah Green Turner is nowhere to be found in the federal census of 1860, joining W. H. Mumler in apparent textual absence.<sup>169</sup> Less than a month after her divorce in 1864, she remarries and becomes Mrs. Hannah F. Mumler and in the 1865 census William, Hannah, Henry and Edwin are residing together.<sup>170</sup> From then on, she is traceable through census records and an official death record, living with William through the 1870 census (probably until 1878, as Directories place them both at 170 West Springfield until that year), and then, from 1880 until her death in 1912, residing with one or both of her Turner sons. By 1880, she abandons the title Mrs. William H. in favour of Mrs. H.F. Mumler, perhaps intending to make public a de facto rather than de jure separation of ways.

If a certain family history and personal trajectory of marital instability characterizes Hannah Mumler's life, public records concerning the marriages of her two sisters offer additional

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<sup>166</sup> 1850 United States Federal Census lists them as living in Charlestown, Middlesex.

<sup>167</sup> Edwin is sometimes listed as Edward. The 1860 census shows Hannah's mother to be living in Boston with daughter Caroline Green.

<sup>168</sup> Published in the *Boston Post* October 8, 1864 and confirmed by the official court records.

<sup>169</sup> In 1860, The Boston Directory has William Mumler working as an engraver at 121 Washington and Stuart at 191 Washington in hairwork, pages 151 and 164.

<sup>170</sup> *1865 United States Federal Census, Inhabitants of Boston in the County of Suffolk, State Massachusetts, enumerated May 1, 1865*, dwelling house 73, family number 125.

information of potential value in a much-needed mapping out of her career. In April 1869, Hannah's sister Caroline married Louis H. Samuels, an individual who had been listed as a photographer in the 1865 Massachusetts State Census and, according to Boston directories would continue in that profession until 1870, sometimes working out of Washington Street.<sup>171</sup> Louis was a member of a Boston family of some accomplishment: his father was a slide preparer for microscopes and taxidermist.<sup>172</sup> His sister Adelaide was a noted children's author and his brother Edward Augustus Samuels was also an author and naturalist who married, Susan Blagge Caldwell Samuels, also an author of children's books.<sup>173</sup> In mid-September of 1869, Hannah's younger sister Eliza, divorced from a first husband, married Edward L. Goodrich, a 33 year-old machinist. Performing the ceremony as Justice of Peace was H. F. Gardner, the very spiritualist who initially supported and then questioned the integrity of some of William Mumler's spirit photography.<sup>174</sup>

Suggested in following the public record for Hannah Mumler and her family, then, is a textured environment in which – at the very same time her husband was being threatened with court action in New York City – her siblings, like herself daughters of a ropemaker, were able to enjoy a relation to the spiritualist community and could make their way into families with larger opportunities and accomplishments. Only a much more thorough investigation of Hannah

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<sup>171</sup> The 1870 *Directory* lists him at 257 Washington Street.

<sup>172</sup> His father, Emanuel Samuels, was "sent to California in order to collect for the Smithsonian Institution, The Boston Society of Natural History and the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia...he secured the type of the Song Sparrow (*Melospiza m. samuelis*) which now bears his name." T. S. Palmer. "Notes on Persons Whose Names Appear in the Nomenclature of California Birds," *The Condor: A Bi-Monthly Magazine of Western Ornithology*, Volume XXX, Number 5 (September-October, 1927):294.

<sup>173</sup> Among Edward's many works was *Fly-Rod and Camera*, 1890, "perhaps the first publication to suggest 'hunting with a camera', instead of a gun". Susan's six-volume series, *Springdale Stories*, 1870, attracted a fair amount of attention. Deidre Johnson, "Mrs. S. B. C. Samuels (Susan Blagge Caldwell Samuels)," ReadSeries.com, accessed August 10, 2015, <http://readseries.com/auth-oz/sam-caldwell-bio.html>. Deidre Johnson, "Adelaide F. Samuels (Adelaide Florence (Samuels) Bassett)," ReadSeries.com, accessed August 10, 2015, <http://readseries.com/auth-oz/samuelsbio.html>.

<sup>174</sup> See footnote 106 on page 53.

Mumler's life can establish the degree to which family and the enhanced positioning of some of its members might have helped her ride out any ignominy resulting from her husband's legal difficulties. Unfortunately, to reiterate, official public records have failed to give a clear indication of her whereabouts during the critical period in the development of spirit photography.

Absences in public record can be powerful in the piecing together of histories. Unlike Hannah, the medium whose controlled performance was photographically documented in a compelling fashion by her husband, William H. Mumler, who also showed her enormous public gratitude, Helen F. Stuart remained on the other side of the lens in a number of ways. Evidently, an accomplished photographer and successful business woman, she is never fully 'seen.' Her cdvs often produce what has become the sole remaining visual evidence of lives, yet her own portrait – if ever produced – has eluded everyone. Even stranger, to date I have been unable to detect *any* activity on the part of Mrs. H. F. Stuart except for a very narrow band of time, and even that raises questions. Her professional profile, as documented from 1859-1867 through directories for Boston, has been mentioned earlier. However, there is no mention of her in the Federal Census of 1860 or in the State Census of 1865, so that her professional status is not grounded in a paper trail of official citizenship. Moreover, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, to indicate what happened to her after 1867.<sup>175</sup> No city directories suggest the continued existence of her practices as photographer and hair jeweler, and no documents of an official nature – census return, death certificate – are locatable. All efforts to break through this “vanishing act” have failed.

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<sup>175</sup> The final reference to her that I have been able to locate is an entry in the *Boston Almanac and Directory* for 1867 which lists her as a “hair work manufacturer” working at 2 Winter Street.

## Conclusion: “Who Is Mrs. Stuart?”

As mentioned, the February 26, 1869 article published in the *New York Sun* makes passing mention of something I at first dismissed as misinformation but have since revisited: “Mrs. Mumler, who is the lady by whom Mr. Mumler was led into the business, having since married him, asserts that in many instances she has seen behind the living sitter the identical spirits whose likenesses have afterwards appeared in the photograph.” As these types of sources are generally suspect – in this instance the reporter having even withheld his own name – I looked to more reliable sources to explore this possibility.

An even earlier article, written by Spiritualist Albert Morton – a man who claimed intimate knowledge of the couple – alludes to the same scenario. In his 1886 article entitled “Spirit Portraits By Mumler”, Morton writes that Mumler’s “occupation was formerly that of engraving upon silver, in which he was very skillful.” He then added that “[while] experimenting in the study of photography, in the gallery of the lady who afterwards became his wife, he was annoyed by spots upon the negatives, which shortly developed into forms and faces which were recognized as the likenesses of deceased persons.”<sup>176</sup>

Another seemingly reliable source was brought to my attention by Robert S. Cox in the pages of *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of Spiritualism*. Currently residing at the Clements Library of Michigan University, the memoirs of Spiritualist James V. Mansfield are cited throughout Cox’s text. As this was the first I had encountered The Mansfield Papers, and as it was also in *Body and Soul* that I first read the name ‘Mrs. A.M. Stuart’, I hoped The Mansfield

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<sup>176</sup> Morton. “Spirit Portraits by W. H. Mumler,” 33. Sharpe generously shares this hypothesis in the introductory chapter of her thesis. On first mention of Mrs. Helen F. Stuart, she notes that she had encountered a source from 1886 which suggests that Stuart is the woman who later became William Mumler’s wife. Though Sharpe concluded that this could not be so, I did not agree with her reasons for discounting the possibility and sought out the article.

Papers might prove key to piecing together her story. Sadly, on page 237 of his memoirs it becomes clear that the identity of Stuart was shrouded in mystery for at least some of her Spiritualist contemporaries: “Who is Mrs. Stuart?” asks Mansfield.<sup>177</sup>

Rather than clarify the identity of each woman, these sources leave open a possibility my other research has also led me to conclude. It appears as though Mrs. Helen F. Stuart and Mrs. Hannah F. Green-Mumler were more than likely the same person. This scenario not only stands to explain the missing years in each woman’s timeline, it also makes sense logically, given what we know of their professional endeavours. As we have seen, *The New York Sun* article of 1869 matter-of-factly places talents of what in Mumler scholarship have been credited to two women into the hands of one woman, and names her the future Mrs. Mumler.<sup>178</sup> Why trust an unnamed reporter? Because this counter-narrative – right before us the whole time – is far more plausible than that put forth by William Mumler himself, than that which has been perpetuated in most histories of spirit photography. Unbelievable though it may seem, there is more evidence that points to this scenario than not. As mentioned, the very years that Hannah disappears from records are the only ones during which Helen exists. (See Appendix, page 82). The only year in which both women are documented is 1864, and this does not represent a true overlap as Hannah exists only via her divorce and then remarriage records whereas Helen is listed solely in business directories for that year. Otherwise, Hannah is listed nowhere between 1855-65 and Helen F.

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<sup>177</sup> James V. Mansfield, *James V. Mansfield Papers*, 1859-1933 (bulk 1862-1864). (Michigan: William L. Clements Library), 237. “The James V. Mansfield papers include 27 volumes of bound letters and 2 account books. With the exception of two letters, each volume contains the outgoing correspondence of Mansfield, who was a “writing medium” by profession, and a prominent member of the spiritualist movement during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. The letters were sent to his wife and children in Chelsea, Massachusetts, when he lived in San Francisco, California, for two years.” “James V. Mansfield Papers,” William L. Clements Library, Manuscript Division Finding Aids, accessed November 7, 2014. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clements/mss/umich-wcl-M-2930man?subview=standard;view=reslist>

<sup>178</sup> “A Wonderful Mystery: Ghosts Sitting for their Portraits,” *The New York Sun* (February 26 1869), 2.



Stuart – a woman for whom there are no appropriately named birth, death or marriage records – exists only between the years 1859-67.

The very real possibility, what I have come to believe is the near certainty, that the two women were one and the same is not especially convenient for my research.<sup>179</sup> It raises a whole host of questions about why Mrs. H. F. Stuart may have been a fiction. Was she concocted so that Hannah, a young mother of two, could struggle to support the small family under a name that could protect her from a “problem” husband or allow her to navigate nineteenth-century society’s negative perceptions of separated women until such time as she was able to file for divorce based on desertion? Was there a need to avoid the name Mrs. Hannah Turner for some reason that has not yet been discovered? In making the suggestion that some form of shelter was being sought through Hannah’s use of a false identity, how does one reconcile this with a certain boldness in the taking up, in public, of a profession such as hairwork manufacturer under any name, given the evident rarity of named female producers at the time? And, after presumably having achieved some security or social credibility through her marriage through her 1864 marriage to William H. Mumler, why would Hannah have continued to use the Stuart name to advertise her photographic production, while also – in 1865 – advertising herself under her own name as a clairvoyant? Since she had been making photography under the Stuart name, it would make sense from a business perspective to maintain such an identity with her clientele, but then why risk confusing the issue with a second identity? Perhaps some form of eventual liberation from the lie was being constructed: shortly thereafter, Mrs. H. F. Stuart unceremoniously fades

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<sup>179</sup> In an internet posting which appeared in March of this year, Marc Demarest demonstrates how awkward a dawning realization of the obscurity of “Mrs. H. F. Stuart” can be. Reacting to what appears a paraphrased version of the 1869 *New York Sun* article, and not having researched the divorce documents for Hannah Mumler, he simply speaks of the existence of a Mrs. Hannah Green Turner Stuart Mumler. “The Woman in The Business: Hanah F. Green Stuart Mumler,” *Chasing Down Emma*, accessed April 1, 2015. <http://ehbritten.blogspot.ca/2015/03/the-woman-in-business-hannah-f-green.html>

away, her business – negatives and props – seemingly absorbed by William Mumler. At this same time, Hannah the mesmeric physician emerges from William’s spirit photography business, eventually existing independently and outliving the phenomenon by nearly forty years. Of course a rationalization of all these questions through a new, seamless narrative is possible, but that would still beg the question as to why the interviewer for the *New York Sun* was presented with a story by the Mumlers in 1869 that was so at variance with what was presented in court but weeks later and maintained in later texts published by Mumler. Could it be that the admission of any kind of fraud, even an understandable one, couldn't be entertained in an environment which didn't always take kindly to spirit photographers?"

The apparent absence of government documentation and the troubling questions about identity raised in the testimony of some of her contemporaries is not the only material that points to the two women being one. The way Hannah chose to represent herself in advertisements also revealed an innate aptitude for the visual, characteristics otherwise attributed to Helen F. Stuart. That a portrait accompanied her February 1894 advertisement for mesmeric physician was unusual in and of itself but the image was also accompanied by the bold inscription: “Animal Magnetism”.<sup>180</sup> The great attention to detail within the drawn portrait is striking and deliberate, one hand cupping the side of her smirking face. She is ornamented with a haircomb and bracelet, a great shawl draped over her shoulders is joined at the front of her chest by flowers, (Fig.39). The words she employed in her advertisement entitled “Wonderful Cures,” from November of 1893, are also those of a highly visual individual.<sup>181</sup> She claimed her special powers had existed only once before by a well-known Boston physician, presumably reaffirming her connection to the control spirit of Dr. Rush and then disclaiming connections with so-called mediums in the

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<sup>180</sup> “Wonderful Cures,” *Cambridge Chronicle*, 12.

<sup>181</sup> “Mrs. Dr. H. F. Mumler, Mesmeric Physician,” *Cambridge Chronicle*, 12.

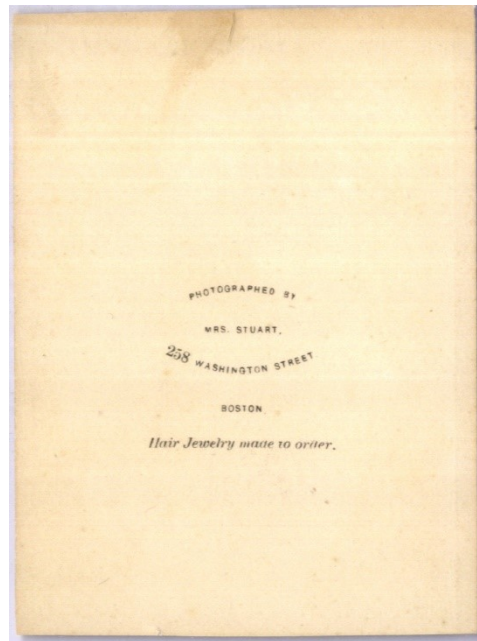
next. She is above this now. “Men who are groping in the dark, and really experimenting with their patients, come to her for light.” This power is “born in her, as artists or musicians are born. She is a cultured lady of fine personal appearance, tremendous and unwearable [sic] vitality, and in conversation one is impressed as her pure, direct English pours forth, with her self-confidence, born of continued success.” In closing she added: “There are inspired poets, musicians, painters, those whose hands and brains are guided by the Supreme, can anyone say why there should not be inspired physicians?”<sup>182</sup>

Having read much of the available literature and examined many of Mrs. H. F. Stuart and William Mumler’s cdvs, I am fairly convinced that Helen – be she also Hannah Mumler or not – concocted spirit photography and presented the idea to a man with complimentary skills so that the innovation might move forward.<sup>183</sup> As a producer of hair jewelry, a professional photographer – potentially a magnetic healer and medium well into her eighties – and above all, as a woman, she was *uniquely* equipped to envision the fresh consideration of the death ritual that spirit photography represents. I had good reason to be suspicious of William H. Mumler’s perpetuated claims to spirit photography. Future scholars need no longer adhere to a narrative that excludes women, because, simply put, a man is unlikely to have concocted these enchanted mementoes. Hopefully this challenge to Mumler’s narrative will lead to a general revision of the history of spirit photography and potential uncovering of other pioneering women. Meanwhile, in the absence of a portrait or clear description of her activities, Helen F. Stuart remains William H. Mumler’s ghostly extra, haunting the very images she envisioned.

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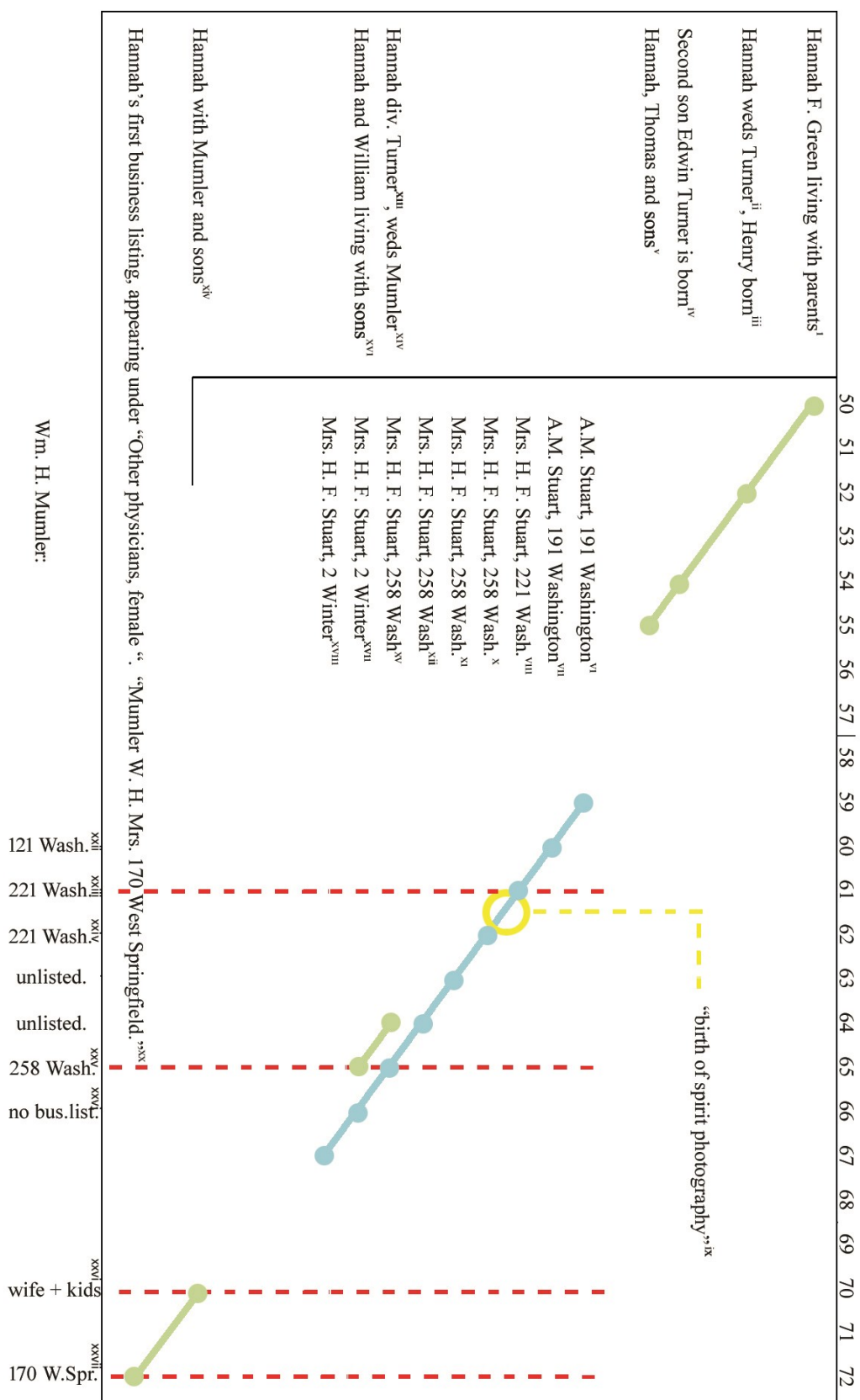
<sup>182</sup> “Mrs. Dr. H. F. Mumler, Mesmeric Physician,” *Cambridge Chronicle*, 12.

<sup>183</sup> Not to be interpreted as hesitation in making this claim, simply to acknowledge Stuart’s worth as photographer and ability regardless of her status as Hannah’s alias.



**Figure 40** Mrs. Helen F. Stuart  
*Unidentified Woman in Mourning*, 1861-67.  
Author's Personal Collection

## Appendix





- <sup>i</sup> 1850 United States Federal Census, City of Charleston in the County of Middlesex, August 6, 1850, 68.
- <sup>ii</sup> On March 11, 1852. *Marriages Registered in the Town of Charlestown, Massachusetts, For the Years 1843-1873*, Vol.9., entry number 36.
- <sup>iii</sup> Henry N. Turner is born December 22, 1852. *Massachusetts Birth Records: Births Registered in the Town of Medford for the year 1852*, 124.
- <sup>iv</sup> Edwin B. Turner is listed as six months old in the 1855 United States Federal Census, *Inhabitants in Ward 3 Charlestown in the County of Middlesex, State Massachusetts, enumerated June 21, 1855*, 157.
- <sup>v</sup> 1855 United States Federal Census, *Inhabitants in Ward 3 Charlestown in the County of Middlesex, State Massachusetts, enumerated June 21, 1855*, 157.
- <sup>vi</sup> "Mrs. A. M. Stuart, artist in hair, 191 Washington, house at Chelsea" and "A.M. Stuart" under "Hair Work Manufacturers," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1859*, 385 and 459.
- <sup>vii</sup> "Mrs. A. M. Stuart, artist in hair, 191 Washington," *Boston Almanac for the year 1860*, XXV, 164. "Mrs. A. M. Stuart, artist in hair, 191 Washington" and "A.M. Stuart, 191 Washington" listed under "Hairwork Manufacturers," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1860*, 407 and 490.
- <sup>viii</sup> "Stuart Mrs. H.F. 221 Washington" under "jewellers manufs.," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1861*, 514. "Stuart, H.F., Mrs, Residence:1861, 5 Blackstone Square," Ronald Polito ed., *A Directory of Massachusetts Photographers: 1839-1900*, (Boston: Picton Press, 1933), 127.
- <sup>ix</sup> On a Sunday in March of 1861. William H. Mumler, "The Personal Experiences, Part One," 1.
- <sup>x</sup> "Stuart Mrs. H. F., hair jewelry manuf. 258 Wash. House 69 Blackstone Square," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1862*, 389.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ronald Polito ed., *A Directory of Massachusetts Photographers: 1839-1900*, (Boston: Picton Press, 1933), 127.
- <sup>xii</sup> "Stuart Mrs. H. F. hair jewelry manuf. 258 Washington, h. 1171 do" and "Stuart H.F. Mrs. 258 Wash" under "Jewellers. (manufs.)," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1864*, 345 and 429.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Published in the *Boston Post* October 8, 1864 and confirmed by the official court records dated May 23, 1864. At this time she claims desertion as of January 1, 1859.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Marriage to Mumler takes place October 12, 1864. Massachusetts Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988, *Marriages Solemnized in Marblehead, County of Essex, 1850-1866*, page 86.
- <sup>xv</sup> "Stuart Mrs. H. F. hair jewelry manuf. 258 Washington, h. 1171 do" and "Stuart H.F. Mrs. 258 Wash" under "Jewellers. (manufs.)," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1865*, 389 and 487.
- <sup>xvi</sup> *Boston State Census 1865*, enumerated May 1, 1865, dwelling house 73, family number 125.
- <sup>xvii</sup> "Stuart H. F. Mrs. hair jewelry manuf. 2 Winter, h. 1068 Washington," also under "Jewellers. (manufs.)," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1866*, 435 and 523. Note: A "Guild and Delano" are listed at the same address under "Jewelry, Watches and Plate."
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Boston Almanac for 1867*, Vol. 32, p. 177. Note: On the following page, there is a large advertisement for Guild and Delano at 2 Winter street. They include hair jewelry among their services, she must have worked for them. As she is not listed in the 1867 *Boston Directory*, she was out of business as of July, perhaps even as early as 1866.
- <sup>xix</sup> 1870 United States Federal Census, *Inhabitants in North part, 11<sup>th</sup> ward Boston in the County of Suffolk, State Massachusetts, enumerated June 6, 1870*, 51. Note: William is listed as a photographer, Hannah is "keeping house".
- <sup>xx</sup> "Mumler W. H. Mrs. 170 West Springfield" under "Other physicians, female," *Boston Business Directory for 1872*, 210.
- <sup>xxi</sup> "Mumler, Wm H., 121 Washington" listed under "engravers," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1860*, 294.
- <sup>xxii</sup> "Mumler Wm H., silver engraver, 221 Washington," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1861*, 322.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> "Mumler Wm H., silver engraver, 221 Washington," *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1862*, 296.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> "Mumler Wm H. photograph publisher, 258 Wash." *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1865*, 297.
- <sup>xxv</sup> "Mumler, Wm. H. house 1176 Washington" *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1866*, 332. He is not listed under "photographers" and there is no business address or specification after his name. Though Stuart does not appear in the Directory of 1867, Mumler does, working again with his brother. "Mumler, A. C. & Wm. H. engravers, 204 Washington...[Wm.] house 1576 do." *Boston City Directory for year beginning July 1, 1867*, 369.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> See note XIX.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> "Mumler Wm. H. 170 West Springfield" under "Photographers," *Boston Business Directory for 1872*, 208. H.F. Stuart has residences listed after her business address for the years 1861-65 but her existence at any residence is not confirmed by a census. H.F. Green has no recorded address before 1872.

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